



# MOTORISTS FACE MAJOR DELAYS

Report by Richard Guttridge

**DRIVERS are facing roadworks misery with busy routes hit by delays due to temporary traffic lights and long detours.**

Motorists on a main road running through Rowley Regis are hardest hit with roadworks set to last for months.

Temporary traffic lights will go up on Doulton Road during the first week of the new year as work is carried out to connect 200 new homes to gas, water and electricity supplies.

The work, being done by utility companies, will get under way on January 3 and will also cause disruption for residents.

The connections will supply new homes being built by developers Kier Homes, Countryside and Smart Build Solutions on Doulton Road and another small development of two homes on Dudley Road.

Sandwell Council's roads boss Councillor David Hosell said: "These are essential works to connect these new homes to water, sewers, gas and electricity supplies.

"We really need new homes built in Sandwell but with that comes the job of connecting these sites up to utilities. This will cause some inconvenience in the area and I'd ask people to be patient. It's something that is unavoidable.

"I am sure the utility companies and their contractors will make sure this work as swiftly as they can, but it's a big job."

## Hospital

The largest development is to build 188 homes on a former haulage firm site off Doulton Road, a mix of properties over 12.8 acres of land.

Meanwhile, carriageway reconstruction work will be taking place on the B4179 Commonsides in Pensnett from the first week of January, forcing traffic heading south to be diverted past Russells Hall Hospital.

A temporary one-way system will come into force on a route already often clogged with traffic heading towards Merry Hill shopping centre.

The one-way system will be running between 9.30am and 3.30pm and is scheduled to be in place for three weeks.

The area where work will take place will stretch from Corbys Hall Road down to Bryre Road.

Motorists have been advised to give themselves more time for their journeys or consider finding another route.

Dudley Council said the work had been planned outside peak times in order to create as little disruption as possible.

Bosses said clear diversion signs would be in place to guide motorists.

Pensnett councillor Karen Jordan warned that the work would cause significant disruption in the area.

Work is also taking place this weekend on Birmingham New Road near Shaw Road.

## BIKERS HELP SANTA DELIVER FOR YOUNG PATIENTS



Halesowen boy Henry Torrington, six, who has been a patient at the children's hospital, was supporting the toy run with his father Lee at Streetbike

BIKERS took to the streets of Halesowen and Birmingham to donate toys and essential items to ill youngsters and their families.

A total of 300 bikers from across the West Midlands came together on Sunday to present patients at Birmingham Children's Hospital with Christmas presents.

Riders dressed up as elves, reindeer, snowmen and even Santa to travel from Streetbike, on Dudley Road, Halesowen, to Ronald McDonald House on St Mary's Row in Birmingham.

The bikers were joined by motorcycle stars,

former British Superbike champion John Reynolds, and paramedic Steve Harris, who led the convoy.

Gary Marshall, owner and director of Streetbike said: "The ride out went very well. The aim of the event was not only to make sure that children at Birmingham Children's Hospital received a present but that Ronald McDonald House also got the basic every day essentials.

"We took two vans piled high with toys as well as basics like tea and coffee to the children and their families."

Stewart Boggild, one of the organisers of the event, said it had been fantastic day.

"To see the smiles on the children's faces when we arrived, that makes it all worthwhile," he said. "I think we had the whole of Birmingham out there and cheering us on when we turned up."

The organisers are already looking forward to their next charity event.

Mr Boggild said: "You'll absolutely see us again soon.

"We'll be organising the Easter Egg run next year, so watch this space for that."

## APPEAL

### Generous readers donate 8,500 items

AN INCREDIBLE 8,500 food items and toiletries have been donated to the Express & Star's Feed a Family This Christmas appeal.

The Chronicle's sister newspaper has been overwhelmed by the kindness of people across the Black Country and Staffordshire who have dug deep to help those less fortunate.

Donations of festive treats and other produce have flooded in since the appeal was launched five weeks ago. Every item will go towards helping families to put a substantial meal on the table this Christmas.

## HEALTH

### Care partners get extra £4m boost

A £4.3 million cash boost has been awarded to Dudley's clinical commissioning group to further improve health and social care in the borough.

The money will be awarded to the All Together Better partnership which is a national programme made up of health and social care organisations.

The 'vanguard' programme aims to deliver improved outcomes by improving the access to, and continuity of, care through the integration of services around the patient and GP practice.

## COUNCIL

### Tory boss opposes leisure centre move

DUDLEY Council's plan to close three leisure centres and build two new facilities could be in doubt after opposition councillors suggested they may not back it.

The controversial proposals have been met with a public backlash with more than 2,500 people signing a petition calling to save the centres in Dudley, Stourbridge and Halesowen.

The council's bid to have just two new leisure centres serving the borough, on Flood Street and in Lye, would need support of some opposition councillors but Tory group leader Councillor Patrick Harley insists the borough has three centres.



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# Hospital trust appoints chief executive



New hospital boss Diane Wake

THE trust which runs Dudley's Russells Hall Hospital has announced the appointment of a new chief executive. Diane Wake will take on the top job, joining the Dudley Group NHS Trust from a similar role in Barnsley. She will replace Paula Clark, who announced she was quitting as chief executive in August to take over at crisis-hit Stafford County Hospital. Ms Wake will start work in the post in April. She has been chief executive at the Barnsley Hospital NHS Foundation Trust for three years and previously held a senior role in Liverpool.

Ms Wake said: "I am thrilled at the appointment and look forward to making a difference for the patients of Dudley and surrounding areas. "I am passionate about making local services right for people and in Dudley there are lots of opportunities to do just that. "Working with GPs and other local providers to develop the Multi-speciality Community Provider services will result in ground-breaking changes to the way services are accessed and coordinated for patients and their families. "At the same time, together with my

executive team, we will ensure that hospital services continue to perform amongst the best in the country and are sustainable longer term." "I am looking forward to meeting as many staff as possible and working with the council of Governors to make sure patients and the public's voices are heard at the board and used to make a difference to services." Standards at Russells Hall improved dramatically under the guidance of Ms Clark as it became one of the best performing hospitals in the country in some areas of service.

# Return of the age of the train as more travel

THE number of people catching trains across the Black Country and Staffordshire has increased by nearly seven per cent in the last year.

There were 20.375 million 'entries and exits' at stations across the region in 2015/16, up from 19.081 million the year before.

Of the region's 33 railway stations, just three saw their overall visitors decline during that time. According to the estimates of the usage by the Office of Rail and Road, Wolverhampton railway station, which is operated by Virgin Trains, saw 4.746m visitors in 2015/16 - an increase of 5.6 per cent from 2014/15's total of 4.495m.

Dudley's busiest station, Stourbridge Junction, saw an increase to 1.434m. It rose from 1.323m and showed an 8.3 per cent rise.

Rowley Regis, which was the busiest in Sandwell, was used by 1.015m passengers after 921,116 people used it in 2014/15. People using Walsall rose to 1.404m from 1.303m in 2014/15 - a 7.7 per cent increase.

Steve Wright from independent campaign group Railfuture said: "We are very enthusiastic about rail in the West Midlands and it is generally accepted that the growth in the West Midlands is growing more quickly than anywhere else in the country.

## Franchise

"We are looking forward to the next franchise, which is due in July next year for October next year. That may see some significant improvements in frequency."

He said the pressure group is 'actively campaigning' to see a line reopened between Walsall and Wolverhampton. London Midland operates all the stations in the Black Country and Staffordshire, other than Wolverhampton and Stafford.

Its spokesman Francis Thomas said: "We have seen phenomenal growth in the last eight years since the franchise began." Seventy-five million people travel with us every year across the London Midland network and we have invested over £100m in that time and demand has grown."

The busiest station outside London was Birmingham New Street, with just over 39m people using it.

## Paige design winner



Imaginative young Paige Oliver has won the Halesowen Chronicle Christmas card competition with her image of Santa, sponsored by Shepherd Motors. The pupil at Manor Way Primary Academy in Halesowen impressed readers who voted for her design. Paige won a set of cards with her design and a cheque for £50 was presented to her school. Paige is pictured with Halesowen Chronicle senior sales consultant Chris Smith and Manor Way Primary Academy headteacher Lisa Buffery

# Call to protect officers

SIX West Midlands Police officers attacked while on duty have called on lawmakers to ramp up sentences for those who assault officers and other emergency services staff.

The group is part of a delegation from the force that met with MPs in Parliament to urge them to do more to protect bobbies on the beat and ambulance workers.

They want to see more widespread use of Tasers, the electro-shock stun weapons which they say enable officers to better protect the public and themselves. They also discussed the use of 'spit hoods', which shield officers from people who try to spit at or bite them.

Tom Cuddeford, interim chairman of West Midlands Police Federation, said: "We want to see better support from MPs for our campaign for tougher and more consistent sentencing of those convicted of assaulting police officers, police staff and other emergency workers."

"We have heard of cases where someone who has thrown acid in an officer's face has received a 20-month prison sentence and another convicted of stabbing an officer being given a 40-day community order. How can that be right? How can that act as a deterrent to others?"

Figures for the first nine months of this year show that almost 600 WMP officers were assaulted while on duty. Mr Cuddeford hoped the figures would give MPs an understanding of the impact of the high number of assaults.

# Drug addict charity box thief is put behind bars

A DRUG addict who stole charity collection boxes, broke into the same pub twice and used someone else's bank card to buy booze has been jailed.

Wolverhampton Crown Court heard that Wayne Ball targeted The Cave pub in Dudley while it was being renovated. The 32-year-old went on to snatch collection boxes from a Your Local Express, containing £250, before being tracked down after being pictured on CCTV.

Ball, from Swancotes Road, Dudley, pleaded guilty to two counts of burglary, three counts of fraud, one count of handling stolen goods, one count of theft and one of cannabis possession. He was given three-and-a-half years in prison.

The burglary charges relate to two separate incidents where he broke into The Cave pub in Wren's Hill Road, in which he stole a plate compactor tool, 60 inch TV and caused damage. He had been given a suspended sentence after the first incident.

Prosecuting, Sati Ruck, said: "The stolen card he used to purchase alcohol - which he then sold for drug money - was taken during a house robbery which he says he had no part in. He claims to have found the card in an alleyway near the house."

Defending Ball, Estelle Thornber said he had been suffering with addictions to crack cocaine and heroin.

Handing Ball a jail sentence, Judge Nicholas Webb told him: "You were given another chance after breaking into The Cave the first time, but just five days later you're doing the same thing."

# Horse rescue at museum canal

A HORSE belonging to the Black Country Living Museum fell into a canal during a boat pulling practice session and had to be rescued.

The fire service had to be called to lift the horse, called Danny, out of the water, following the incident on Thursday afternoon. The 14-year-old horse had slipped into the canal.

Laura Wakelin, director of communications at the Tipton Road museum, said: "They were practising when one of our horses unfortunately slipped and fell into the canal. He was with two of our horse handlers, and one of them, Chris Turton, actually jumped in to help."

They called the fire service for assistance and Danny was soon back on dry land without injury.

# Warning of works on a busy route

MAJOR disruption is expected on the Birmingham New Road as work takes place over the weekend.

Lane restrictions will be in place at the junction of Shaw Road between 9.30am and 3.30pm on both Saturday and Sunday.

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# Major cuts for police 'a kick in the teeth'

WEST Midlands Police has had its funding cut by £6 million for next year, which the region's police boss described as a 'kick in the teeth' in a letter to Home Secretary Amber Rudd.

Britain's second biggest force will receive £444.1m – down from £450.1m.

Analysis shows that nationwide police force's Government funding will actually be cut by more than £96m next year, despite the promise that police funding will be protected.

The Home Office is including potential increases in council tax with actual Government funding when calculating the funding.

Mr Jamieson said: "The Policing Minister is trying to say that council tax paid by hard working people is in fact direct funding. It is a kick in the teeth to council tax payers and just not correct.

"The Policing Minister is trying to cover up his cuts and cling to the myth that police funding has been protected – it hasn't. The public may see this as a deception.

"He needs to set the record straight urgently. Funding to local police forces is falling whatever tricks the government may employ."

He added: "Across the country local police forces are facing more than £96m in cuts, which equates to a potential reduction of 2,014 police officers."

Mr Jamieson said: "The West Midlands has seen its force hit harder than anywhere else in the country."

# Hopes high for light rail funding

COUNCIL bosses are hopeful a multi-million pound 'very light rail' innovation centre in Dudley will start after submitting a new funding bid.

Outline plans for the £27.8m complex at Castle Hill were approved in October with chiefs now focusing on securing the money to pay for it.

The centre would be created for the design and construction of lightweight rail vehicles plus research and development facilities.

Dudley Council has lodged a bid for a total of £837,000 with the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership Development boss Councillor Khurshid Ahmed said: "Creating jobs is a top priority for the council and the very light rail scheme will deliver on this."

# More police speed checks on road

SPEED checks have been stepped up along a Dudley road after two fatal accidents in recent months.

Police say they are responding to community concern about Priory Road.



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# Protesters question 'ridiculous' plan



Protesters outside the council meeting

PROTESTERS say plans to knock down three leisure centres in Dudley borough are ridiculous.

Dudley Council wants to build two new centres to replace those closed.

An axe hovers over Dudley Leisure Centre, on Wellington Road, Halesowen Leisure Centre, on Great Cornbow Road, and The Crystal Leisure Centre, Stourbridge.

The new sites suggested are at Flood Street in Dudley and land off the Lye bypass, meaning Halesowen being without a leisure centre.

The Save Our Leisure Centres

group has gained more than 2,500 names on its anti-closure petitions.

The cash-strapped council says it would cost over £19 million to bring the three existing centres up to date.

The Save Our Leisure Centres campaign is being led by former councillor Tracy Wood, who was at the protest by leisure centre users outside a council cabinet meeting on Wednesday.

"It doesn't make any sense," she said.

"I can't see how it is cheaper and more efficient to close three and build two new centres. They could refurbish them – we are not asking for gold-plated treadmills."

The meeting saw the approval of the next stage, a planning model to be created so the council can put forward a business case for the proposals.

Among those demonstrating was Sarah Woodward, fundraiser and coach for charity Dudley Olympics, whose activities include providing weekly swimming sessions for more than 50 disabled people at Halesowen Leisure Centre. She said their clients were 'really upset' by the council move.

# Murder arrest after woman found dead

**A MAN has been arrested on suspicion of murder over the death of a woman in Kinver.**

The 26-year-old woman's body was discovered at a house in the South Staffordshire village.

Staffordshire Police said officers were treating her death as suspicious and a 38-year-old man from Kinver was arrested. He remained in custody for questioning on suspicion of murder on Tuesday.

A Home Office post mortem examination was scheduled to take place. A police guard remained outside the house in Kenrose Mill after the find on Sunday at around 9.30am.

The woman's family was informed of her death and have been offered support by specially trained officers.

Among the tributes left outside the house was one that read: "To Mommy. Miss you so much".

Neighbours on the quiet residential road said they believed the man lived with the woman at the address but that they had only moved in a few weeks ago.

One, who did not want to be named, said: "I think they rented the house. They moved in about three weeks ago. They seemed very happy. The woman was rollerskating in the road the days before with some children. But I gather the children weren't there."

## Tributes

Another, who also wanted to remain anonymous, said: "They had just moved in. I didn't really know them at all."

In tributes left outside the house, family and friends had paid tribute to the woman.

They included: "You mean the world to me. Will always love you xxx", "RIP beautiful. Love you so much, going to miss you forever. Love you always. Can't wait to see your beautiful face."

West Midlands Ambulance Service spokesman Jamie Arrowsmith said: "We attended with an ambulance, a community paramedic response vehicle and a paramedic area support officer. We had reports of a woman in cardiac arrest.

"Unfortunately, on arrival it became clear she couldn't be saved and was confirmed deceased."

Anyone with information should contact Staffordshire Police on 101 or Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.

## Fundraiser for family after tragedy



Stourbridge firefighters, including crew commander Chris Green on the bike, held a charity car wash

HUNDREDS of pounds has been raised through a charity car wash to help the family of a father-of-two motorcyclist who died in a road accident in Halesowen.

Motorists queued up at Stourbridge Fire Station to have their cars soaped and polished on Saturday by firefighters and helpers.

Tom Winters, aged 22, from Kidderminster, died after his motorcycle hit a tree beside Manor Way two months ago.

An online funding page launched by friend Lewis Tisdall has raised around £8,000 for the family so far. Mr Tisdall described his friend as 'an adored father, son, husband, brother and friend, who touched the lives of many with his kindness, compassion and beautiful humour.'

Members of the emergency services, including firefighters from Stourbridge, battled to save Mr Winters after the accident on Oc-

tober 30 but he was pronounced dead at the scene.

Mr Winters, a sales assistant at Streetbike in Halesowen, had been on his way to work on the morning of the collision.

An inquest, which heard there was no suggestion of excessive speed, has been adjourned for further police investigations.

Stourbridge crew commander Chris Green revealed that just under £600 was raised on the day.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

## Inquiry launched into prison riot

JUSTICE Secretary Liz Truss has commissioned a 'full investigation' into the riot at Winson Green prison.

Violence flared on Friday at the privately-run HMP Birmingham after a prison officer's keys were stolen.

It took more than 12 hours to contain the trouble with a 'Tornado Squad' of specialist officers being sent in and many prisoners later sent to other jails.

One inmate was reportedly seriously injured and four wings were badly damaged at the 1,450-capacity prison run by private firm G4S.

## Axe swinging thug tried to steal a car

A MOTORIST was targeted by a thug with an axe who he tried to steal his car.

Police are investigating after the terrifying incident in Halesowen on Monday, December 12.

A 22-year-old man was driving home from a shopping trip to the Merry Hill centre when a car pulled up alongside him on Most Drive and a man jumped out, smashing the passenger window with an axe.

But the frightened motorist managed to drive away and is not thought to have been hurt.

## Toys for all after donations appeal

UNDER-PRIVILEGED children in Dudley will have a chance to unwrap surprise presents this Christmas as generous customers and staff have donated toys.

Thanks to an initiative run by Dudley Council and Sainsbury at Amblecote and Merry Hill shopping centre, the annual toy appeal will see more than 100 toys and gifts go towards a family Christmas party held by the council-run Family and Adolescent Support Team.

## Hospice donation on the cards from firm

GENEROUS staff at a recruiting agency have donated £1,000 to a hospice instead of sending Christmas cards.

Workers at Masstemp Ltd, based in Dudley and Kidderminster, gave the money to the Mary Stevens Hospice in Stourbridge. Lindsay Jay, compliance director at Masstemp, said: "We are very proud to support such a great local charity."

The hospice has launched its biggest fundraising drive for a new unit.

## Council to test cabbies

COUNCIL staff will take over the running of tests for taxi drivers in Dudley.

Assessments to ensure drivers were competent before being allowed to go out on the road were previously delivered by the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency, DVSA.

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## THE BEST OF PETER RHODES



MORE weather-forecast English. This week's warning was of "murky-mizzly."

WHOPPERS of our time. I heard one pundit describe the brought-forward hike in council tax to pay for social care as "a temporary rise." Yeah, right.

BUT the council tax had to be the target, didn't it? Freezing it for several years had become a totem of Toryism, a buffer protecting the property-rich from the demands of Britain's uncontrollable welfare bill. The real hit will come when Westminster re-bands the nation's homes based on today's inflated values and the most desirable addresses will be in Much Weeping in the Shires.

SO farewell, Ian McCaskill. I never interviewed the BBC weather forecaster, who recently died, but he suddenly appeared in the office in Broadcasting House many years ago where I was interviewing the chief forecaster, Bill Giles. McCaskill burst in like a busy little shrew, sorting through some papers while robustly denouncing some \*\*\*\*ing \*\*\*\* he had just fallen out with. It was all light-hearted but to hear the housewives' favourite effing and blinding like a navy was a bit of a shock. As I wrote at the time, it was like seeing the Pope spit.



THE curse of predictive texting. A friend and I provided ukulele-and-songs entertainment for a Christmas party under our performing names of Two Old Pluckers. We appeared in the programme as Two Old Plonkers. Our complaint was not upheld.

"EU leaders richly deserved Brexit and British voters were right to give them it." Historian and columnist Niall Ferguson, admitting he was wrong to argue against Brexit and is now relieved to be "back on the right side." There is plenty of time for all you other sinners to repent.

FIRST cracker of the season: "What happened to the hyena who swallowed an Oxo cube? He became a laughing stock."

**Don't miss Peter Rhodes every Monday to Friday in your Express & Star**

# Hospital chiefs want a total smoking ban

**BLACK Country health bosses want to ban smoking from their sites to help improve the health of patients and staff.**

Nearly 16 per cent of the West Midlands' population smoke and tobacco use is still the single largest cause of premature death in the region.

National health chiefs wrote to each trust pushing them to ban smoking in all hospital buildings and grounds to help people give up and improve health.

**By Nathan Briant**

Sandwell and West Birmingham Trust have confirmed that when its super hospital opens in November 2018, all sites will be smoke free.

While the Dudley Group Trust said it was seeking to ban all smoking on its grounds.

Currently both, along with the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust, allow smoking – but only in designated areas.

## Chief

It comes as Public Health England (PHE) chief executive Duncan Selbie wrote to every NHS trust's chief executive in the country pushing them to ban smoking on all hospital buildings and grounds.

Sandwell and West Birmingham Trust's chief executive, Toby Lewis, said: "Our sites will be smoke-free by November 2018 shortly after our new Midland Met Hospital opens. Currently, we have clear smoking shelters on our sites and expect

patients, visitors and staff to only smoke in these designated areas."

Acting chief executive of the Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust, Paul Harrison, said: "The Trust is committed to supporting the health and wellbeing of all staff and visitors to our premises by ensuring a smoke free environment in the direct vicinity of our buildings."

"We do our best to enforce our Smoke Free Policy which states the smoking of cigarettes and e-cigarettes is only permitted in designated smoking shelters at our three hospital sites."

"We offer advice to staff and patients on the risks of smoking and encourage them to stop smoking with the help of nicotine replacements."

"We are in early discussions to create to a totally smoke-free environment and will be consulting with staff and patients."

## Actor plays football hero



Actor James Ayling as Dudley-born Duncan Edwards

THE shirt is Manchester United, the player is Duncan Edwards – Dudley's much loved footballing son.

Actor James Ayling is playing the sporting hero in a low-budget film being shot in the town. The 24-year-old from Sheffield certainly looks the part. The film – The Boy Who Had It All – focuses on the life of Edwards, from growing up in Dudley to his success at Manchester United.

The footballer, who also played for England, died from injuries sustained in the Munich Air Disaster in 1958, when aged just 21. Yorkshireman James, who now lives in Essex, was chosen for the role over 40 other applicants for the film, which has a budget of £5,000 after a successful fundraising project.

Although he can boast a similar athletic build thanks to playing semi-pro hockey, filmmaker Marcus Distant said his actor's main difficulty was picking the Black Country accent. The movie maker said: "The one thing we have had to work on is his accent, which at first came across quite northern. But, after some work we've got him sounding like a Dudley man."

## Couple give away home to refugees

A DEVOUT Christian couple have spent their life savings on a house for asylum-seekers.

Steph and Matthew Neville, from Birmingham, splashed £114,000 on a three bedroom property to help those fleeing conflict – and will let them live there for free.

The couple sacrificed their dream of buying a house together, instead putting 10 years' worth of savings towards a deposit for those needing help.

The couple will continue to live in a religious commune while they pay off the mortgage, having shelved their dream of buying somewhere for the two of them.

But they insist it's not to 'show they're better than anyone else' but to help those seeking asylum build a life for themselves.

Steph, aged 35, said: "We'd been saving up for 10 years, our whole working lives, to put towards a house. But then we started to think about how we wanted to use this money and having both worked with refugees, their stories inspired us. We've heard horrific tales about their struggles and wanted to offer them sanctuary."

Steph and Matthew, also 35, got in touch with the Hope Project, a Midland-based charity offering support for homeless asylum-seekers'. The couple, married for 12 years, bought the house and gave the keys to the charity.

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## Parking concern for homes by hospital

AROUND 130 homes could be built near Russells Hall Hospital, sparking fears it could lead to more parking problems.

Council bosses are poised to approve the plans for the 11-acre development off Red Kite Drive and Middlepark Road.

Objections have been raised including a petition launched by tenants living at sheltered accommodation at Rotary House.

Parking has been a long-term problem with streets near the hospital clogged by motorists keen to avoid parking fees. Hundreds of parking tickets have been issued in the side streets.

The land is also listed as a Site of Local Importance for Nature Conservation, and concern has been raised about the impact on badger colonies.

### Bungalows

The development application comes from Keepmoat Homes for a mix of houses, bungalows and apartments.

Councillor Khurshid Ahmed, planning and regeneration boss, wants the development to go ahead. He said: "It is mixed feelings as far as the community are concerned."

"But this is a regeneration opportunity for more houses, of which there is a great shortage at the moment."

# Fewer than half of Dudley pupils hit new benchmark

**DUDLEY** saw its primary schools fall to the bottom of the pile in the Black Country, with fewer than half of all pupils reaching the benchmark standard.

Across the borough, 49 per cent of pupils achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and maths. Dudley came joint 122nd in the national league table. High-performing schools included Blowers Green Primary and Brierley Hill Primary, both of which saw 82 per cent of youngsters reach the required levels in the three key subject areas.

Dudley's education boss, Councillor Ian Cooper said: "The newly published league tables are disappointing. We recognise that this was a transitional year with schools and teachers working hard to prepare children for new, challenging tests based on a revised national curriculum that places higher demands on children. "Whilst results across the borough are not what we would have wished, it is important to note that a significant number of our schools achieved test results that were significantly above the national average, with many pupils making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics."

He praised teachers for their dedication and added that he expects to see 'a stronger set of results' in 2017.

Just over half of pupils in

### By Pete Madeley

Sandwell's primary schools achieved the expected standards in reading, writing and maths as 51 per cent of 11-year-olds reached the required levels in the Key Stage Two SAT tests.

The results made Sandwell second out of all the Black Country's local authorities.

The borough came joint 105th in the national league table.

The top performing primary in Sandwell was St Gregory's Catholic Primary in Smethwick, where 93 per cent of the 30 pupils who sat exams hit the benchmark standard.

Councillor Simon Hackett, cabinet member for children's services, said: "The Government significantly raised the benchmark for children's performance. The results don't mean that the children aren't doing as well - it's just that the test is now significantly harder"

## Stadium gets £550,000 for new pitch



Steve Gay and Andy Webb from The Dell stadium, Brierley Hill, where a new pitch is planned

AN ARTIFICIAL grass pitch at a sports stadium in Brierley Hill could be getting a £660,000 revamp.

The Dell Stadium on Bryce Road has been granted £550,000 from the Football Foundation through the FA and a potential £110,000 from Dudley Council.

The plans include a refurbishment of the existing pitch, extended pitch area with a new playing surface, hard standing areas, floodlights and storage.

Andy Bell, interim head of sport and leisure at Dudley Council, said: "The pitch has reached the end of its natural life, it was put down in 1998 but various complaints have been made about the quality."

"We're hoping to start work on the construction in March or April which will run for 18 weeks."

The pitch is currently used by Wordsley Wasps, Pensnett Panthers and Dudley Town football clubs.

Mr Bell added: "We're hoping that the new pitch will encourage more clubs to come and train or play at the Dell."

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### More than ever due to use airport

SOARAWAY passenger figures are seeing Birmingham Airport heading into its biggest ever festive period.

Around half-a-million passengers are expected to jet away to visit family or friends or just for a touch of winter sun over the upcoming Christmas fortnight.

It comes hot on the heels of another record-breaking month for the West Midlands gateway, which has enjoyed a blockbuster 2016.

Nearly 780,000 passengers travelled through the airport in November. In total 779,583 passengers were recorded giving an increase of 12.5 per cent compared to the same month last year - equivalent to 86,550 more people.

### Rieu concert at arena postponed

SEVERAL concerts by Dutch violinist Andre Rieu and his orchestra, including one due to be held at the Genting Arena last night (Wednesday), have been postponed after one of his musicians suffered a heart attack.

Mr Rieu, one of the biggest stars of easy listening music, said: "Thank you all so much for your understanding in this difficult moment."

Fans are advised to retain their ticket for the rescheduled Brum show on March 22. Those unable to attend the new date can get full refunds, available from point of sale.

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## IN MY VIEW

with Mark Andrews



# Anyone got a spare library to give away?

THE Black Country Living Museum is looking for an unused former library to add to its open-air village. Something tells me that in the current climate they won't have to look too far to find one.

And there will be a nice art gallery and a few swimming pools available soon...  
□□□

INTERESTINGLY, one of the reasons given by Dudley Council for closing swimming pools is the declining number of people who use them.

Now that I can well believe. Indeed, I used to be a regular user of the pool at Dudley Leisure Centre until 11 years ago or so, when I stopped going altogether. Why? Because they stopped opening to the general public in the evening, to accommodate a swimming club from another centre they had closed.

□□□

A POLL in our sister paper the Express & Star found that 75 per cent of readers think shops should be banned from opening on Boxing Day.

As something of a libertarian, I'm not a fan of banning many things. But then I think back to the days when I used to work Boxing Day, and the distraction of the inconsiderate shoppers who not only considered it their inalienable right to park on our office car park near a well-known shopping mall, but also to climb over the fence next to the window just to get to the shops more quickly.

Can you imagine how annoying that used to be? Does anybody really need to go shopping that badly?

Still if 75 per cent of the population want Boxing Day shopping banned, then maybe the shopping malls will be deserted on December 26. Either that, or our readers are far more sensible than the rest of the population.

□□□

The Football Association is "out of balance", filled with "elderly white men" and in desperate need of reform. So say four, er, elderly white men, who all used to be senior executives of the FA before stepping down for one reason or another.

Greg Dyke, David Bernstein, David Davies and Lord Triesman want the Government to step in and add impose a bit of diversity into the mix. Yippee, never mind Brexit, let's nationalise football.

I suspect if you did a straw poll of most fans about what is wrong with football, the main bugbears would probably revolve around there being too much money in the game, too much of it going to a cartel of half a dozen clubs dotted around London and the north-west, and the persistent under-achievement of the national team.

I bet not one of them would be calling for a task force headed by John Major or Gordon Brown.



The old Elephant & Castle pub in Wolverhampton



Gas Showroom, decorated for the Coronation in 1937



The site of the former Parish's Restaurant, West Bromwich

# Historic buildings to be talk of the town

£10m of Lottery funding could enable landmark buildings to find a new home at a popular attraction. **ROB COX** reports

**HISTORIC** buildings from across the region could resurrected at the Black Country Living Museum under multi-million pound plans to create a 1940-60s town.

Landmark community buildings, much-loved pubs and industrial sites are among those which have been targeted by bosses at the popular tourist attraction.

While some would be taken down brick-by-brick and then rebuilt at the Dudley site, others which no longer exist would be recreated using archive images and information.

The proposed attraction is reliant upon £10 million of Heritage Lottery funding and a bid has been submitted for the cash.

If successful work could begin in 2018 and 93 jobs would be created – with hundreds more while work is carried out.

## Demolition

Among the buildings identified for the 1940-60s town is Woodside Library in Stourbridge Road, Dudley, which has lain empty and boarded up since it was closed in 2008 under council cost-cutting measures.

Also being lined-up for 'translocation' is the West Bromwich Gas Showroom in the town's High Street, and the neighbouring Parish's Restaurant – both of which have been scheduled for demolition.

The showroom was badly damaged by a Blitz raid in 1940.

The Elephant & Castle pub in Wolverhampton was controversially demolished in 2001 but could be revived as a 1950s watering hole to inform visitors about changes in social attitudes towards drinking and social life.

A bowling green could also form part of the attraction, as could a brickworks modelled on



The Harris & Pearson building, in Brettell Lane, Brierley Hill

the former Harris & Pearson site in Quarry Bank. The museum's chief executive Andrew Lovett said he was excited about the proposed town, plans for which are the culmination of a major research project.

He said: "This would be a historic development centred on the 1940s through to the 1960 and which would include a town and also great industrial representation."

"The buildings we have identified would be clustered and we have had great fun designing the streetscape. When was the last time someone got to design a town in the Black Country?"

"We think we have got a very compelling bid for the funding but you have to recognise it is a very competitive environment in which we are seeking the money."

"The message I want to get across which has come about from consultations is about the amount of support we have had for the development from the people of the Black Country. It is hugely heartening for us. It is easy to forget and take that sort of thing for granted but it is a real boost to think we are doing the right thing."

Another building which has been identified for the town is William Griffin & Sons, a chain-making firm in Woods Lane, Cradley, which has also been earmarked for demolition by Sandwell Council.

It would be used to demonstrate the industry's move to merchandised production and the globalisation of trade during the post-war period.

But Mr Lovett said he was most excited by the prospect of relocating Woodside Library with action having being sought by campaigners for several years.

He added: "Having had discussion with the local authority we are aware there is a covenant on that building from the Earl of Dudley who wanted it to be maintained for public use."

"So if that can be brought here it would be great and it would satisfy that covenant."

"It is a large and very striking building and is very much of the style we are after for what we want to create."

A decision on the funding will be made in the spring. If successful, the £10m would be used to create the town, a new visitor centre and car park, as well as the extension of the museum's tram line.

There are also plans to turn the current Rolfe Street Entrance Building into a new learning centre to enable the development of a new learning programme.

Mr Lovett said the scheme could create 93 jobs at the museum, 58 at other Black Country firms and around 450 while construction takes place.



Woodside Library, Dudley, is earmarked for 'translocation'

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# British constitution is alive and kicking

THE UK has long been recognised for having a constitution which is flexible and capable of evolution, unlike many other countries where their constitutions are rigid and fixed because they are enshrined in statute.

This can be seen in the recent Supreme Court case over the question of whether the Government can trigger Article 50 without a further vote of the Westminster Parliament to create a further Act of legislation. It has taken over 20 hours of legal argument over four days to weigh up the merits of the case put forward on both sides.

It is not a question of who is right or wrong, or whether ministers, through executive powers, have the right to use prerogative powers which are reserved to the crown in order to trigger Article 50. In the words of the President of the Supreme Court, Lord Neuberger "we are not being asked to overturn the results of the EU Referendum... the ultimate question in this case concerns the process by which the result can lawfully be brought into effect."

We will know the outcome of the case in January next year. This constitutional debate has reinforced to me as

a lawyer that the British constitution is alive and kicking.

The British constitution has allowed impartial judges to consider a case brought by individuals challenging a decision made by ministers in Government to determine whether or not that decision was lawful. This case demonstrates, regardless of who is right or wrong in this matter, that democracy and individual rights can be freely and openly expressed in Britain.

**COLIN RODRIGUES**  
Hawkins Hatton Corporate  
Lawyers Ltd, Dudley

## Antics of reality TV in bad taste

REGARDING 'I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here' I have only ever watched a small part of one episode some years ago. Then some poor creature was being eaten, but the really sickening part about it was the total disregard for the suffering of the animal.

The message being portrayed is that unless an animal has the 'cute factor' it has no value. Is this really what we want our children to believe? You try to bring them up to have respect and consideration for all creatures and then this revolting barbarism is churned out as entertainment. Everyone involved in the making of this programme should be thoroughly ashamed.

I am amazed that the RSPCA have not done something about it. Of course though the other message being sent out loud and clear is that if enough money or fame is involved basically anything goes.

**SUSAN CLARKE**  
Stourbridge

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### POST

Dudley Chronicle,  
Chronicle Editorial,  
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Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES

### EMAIL

dudley.chrons@  
expressandstar.co.uk

*Letters should be brief and MUST include name, address and telephone number. The Editor reserves the right to condense letters.*

## Council just don't learn from mistakes

DUDLEY Council, over the years, has wasted an awful lot of money, yet the councillors have not learned anything, have they?

In Stone Street there was a small but very useful car park. The council altered it and decided to rename it the 'town square'. It has only been used for this purpose occasionally. Yet this year they have stuck the Christmas tree there. Why? How many visitors to the town centre know that it is there?

Around the town, there are numerous 'plaques' that are supposed to tell people the history of the town. Several times I have spoken to people who have not even noticed them. I asked if there would be leaflets to back up the plaques, and was told 'they are being prepared'. This was way back at the beginning of the summer. Has anyone seen them yet?

And who is the bloke sitting on the bench outside of the bakery? There is, on the bench, writing that explains who he is but it is not easy to read.

Now the council want to waste yet more money that they haven't got.

**PETER COLE**  
Kingswinford

## You have never had it so good

THE talk of today's so-called poverty, in relation to that of the 1920s, gives vent to comparisons of then and now.

No central heating, no double glazing, no fitted carpets, no mains gas, no electricity for your washing machine, tumble dryer, iron, etc.

The hand-me-down clothes were compulsory. There were no fridge freezers, only the frost on the inside of your bedroom windows. No benefits, no work, no pay, no dough, no eat! That world of real poverty. They had no concept of the hardship after the Great War.

I remember stories from my grandmother, who told me that hungry kids would be given a pebble to suck on, thus creating saliva to appease a starving young stomach.

You never had it so good! Poverty? What poverty?

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# Motorist in collision avoids jail despite stolen van lie

AN ELECTRICIAN told police his van had been stolen, after it had crashed into a tree with him at the wheel.

Simon Rowe had used his works van to pick up a takeaway to share with his then partner but careered into a tree in Priory Road, Dudley, after then abandoned the vehicle in a 'dangerous' state.

Rowe lied to officers, telling them the van had been stolen, before later admitting his guilt, prosecutor Neil Ahuja told Wolverhampton Crown Court. He said: "Shortly after 10.30pm on May 18, officers were called to a road traffic collision where a vehicle had been abandoned. There was significant damage to the van and the tree.

## Help charity with holidays for disabled

CHARITY Sense is calling for volunteers from the West Midlands to help out with a short breaks programme which it runs for disabled children.

Launching in February 2017, the short breaks will follow this year's successful programme and will see 30 children and young people experience up to three separate trips away from home over 12 months.

The programme has been praised for the respite it provides for families, and vital developmental benefits for the participants. The breaks are designed to offer the children from the area the chance to make new friends, increase their independence and try new activities, from outdoor trails to cookery classes.

Eleanor Coker, of Sense, said: "You could be kayaking, horse riding, camping, whilst making a big difference to the children we support and their families."

Visit [www.sense.org.uk](http://www.sense.org.uk) or call 020 7520 0962.

He told his partner at the time what had happened and that he was thinking about telling the police that the van had been stolen but she didn't want anything to do with the incident and wouldn't be involved in the lie. Mr Ahuja added: "He was arrested by police and he told them during interview that his partner was lying because she was bitter over a previous break up."

The father-of-two pleaded guilty to perverting the course of justice, driving without due care and attention and failing to surrender to police bail. Rowe was given a fourth-month jail sentence, suspended for two years. He was also disqualified from driving for 18 months, ordered to pay £500 in fines and costs and to carry out 50 hours of unpaid work.

Judge Nicholas Webb told Rowe: "You are very lucky not to be going to prison."

## Bishop backed feed families appeal



The Bishop of Dudley the Rt Rev Graham Usher with donated goods

THE need for food banks means the Black Country faces a "big problem", says the Bishop of Dudley, who backed the Feed a Family This Christmas appeal.

The Right Reverend Graham Usher donated boxes of food and toiletries that he collected himself for the appeal run by The Chronicle's sister newspaper the Express & Star.

The bishop is the latest well-known face to support the campaign which aims to benefit families across the Black Country and Staffordshire.

Well over 3,000 items of food, toiletries and clothing such as socks have been passed on to a number of food banks around the Black Country.

A range of donations, which have included Christmas selection boxes, socks, shower gel and other food items have all been donated by a large number of charitable people and organisations.

The bishop said: "Food banks and people not being able to afford some of the very basics in life is a big problem."

"The Feed a Family appeal is one that goes right to the heart of loving - we're all neighbours and should come together at Christmas time."

"Food banks are still something that are here in our society as people are so stretched financially."

"We have to all come together and look at helping to feed people during this important time."

The Feed a Family appeal ran until December 14, helping the Black Country Food Bank, among others.

## Pick up a name for a zoo penguin

DUDLEY Zoo is looking for help to name its penguins.

The zoo has had great success with its colony since it started in 1991 with just five hand-reared birds. It now boasts a headcount of 85 - one of the largest colonies in the UK.

But following a recent check, bird keepers have discovered that 40 of Penguin Bay's residents don't have official names on their record, just identification numbers.

Zoo spokeswoman Andrea Hales, said: "With so many names to think of we decided to let visitors have the job, so we're offering a limited number of penguin adoption packages where adopters can name their animal themselves, which makes it extra special."

"We'll then add the chosen name to the penguin's official records, which will remain with it for its entire lifetime."

An animal's records are kept on the web-based Zoological Information Management System, which is updated regularly with the animal's health, care and wellbeing details.

It can be shared and accessed across the world and is easily at hand by keepers or the zoo's vet.

Prices of the special penguin adoption packages start from £50 and include a certificate, animal factsheet and photo, the quarterly ZooNooz newsletter and a zoo admission ticket.

## Service is recruiting student paramedics

VACANCIES for student paramedic roles are to open with the West Midlands Ambulance Service.

There will be 300 places on offer with positions available in Black Country, Birmingham, Shropshire, Staffordshire and Coventry and Warwickshire.

The service will receive applications until January 8. For further details on applying for the roles contact recruit ment@wmas.nhs.uk

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## Honour for sex health pioneer

THE founder of Sandwell and Dudley's sexual health service has been honoured in the BBC Radio 4 Woman's Hour Power List.

Helen Brook, founder of Brook, the UK's leading sexual health and wellbeing charity for young people, was one of seven women named in this year's list which celebrates women who have made the biggest impact on women's lives.

The first Brook clinic opened in 1964 offering support and contraception to unmarried women and reducing illegal abortions. This clinic, unlike the Family Planning Association where she had previously worked, was not required to confine its service to women who were married or about to be married.

Helen Brook died in 1997. Today Brook has nine services in Sandwell and Dudley.

# £17m raised from parking fees and fines in five years

**COUNCILS across the Black Country and Staffordshire have made nearly £17 million on parking over the last five years.**

The City of Wolverhampton Council came out highest on the list with a £5,097,000 surplus produced from council parking operations between 2011-2016. It placed Wolverhampton 100 out of the national list of 353 councils. The next highest was Lichfield council which also made more than £5m.

The figures come from the statutory annual returns councils make to the Department for Communities and Local Government and are the result of parking operations, including charges and penalty notices, deducting running costs.

In the 2015-16 financial year alone Wolverhampton council had a surplus of £1.8m and desecrated the figures as 'modest', pointing out that, by law, any surplus from parking enforcement had to be reinvested into transportation projects.

Dudley Council, who had a surplus of £2.3m,

maintain they have more on-street car parking than any other local council.

Councillor Hilary Bills, Dudley's cabinet member for environmental services, said: "Dudley has more free on-street car parking than any neighbouring council. We take steps to encourage free parking in our town centres, where possible, including offering free parking in the town centres on three Saturdays in the run up to Christmas. With central government funding continuing to reduce, we are using all of our funds in the most efficient and effective way possible for the benefit of local people."

## Police crimes are revealed

ASSAULTS, drink-driving, misusing computers and allowing dogs to worry sheep – almost 50 West Midlands police officers have been cautioned or convicted of criminal offences over the past three years.

The list of 46 offenders include police constables, special constables and police sergeants.

A Freedom of Information Request has also revealed what action the officers faced after misconduct hearings. That included dismissal, resignation and management action. Some are still yet to be dealt with.

Since 2014, 28 police officers have been dismissed. Seven have resigned, while six faced management action or a written warning.

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Philip Hammond's card, featuring his dogs, Rex and Oscar



Ian Austin's Christmas card, designed by Charleigh Finch of Bramford Primary School, Dudley



Gavin Williamson's card, by Amelie Moseley of Corbett CE Primary School



MP Mike Wood's card, designed by Maidensbridge Primary Schools pupil Alex Maher



John Spellar's card, given an extra bit of festive pizzazz thanks to Photoshop



Emma Reynolds' card, designed by Perry Hall Primary School pupil Kit Lewis

# MPs play their cards right for Christmas

FROM stunning images of Parliament, to schoolchildren's drawings and a pair of lovable pooches decked out in festive scarves – MPs have some novel ways of spreading the Christmas cheer.

While some politicians stick to the standard House of Commons issue cards, others run competitions among local school children which can last for months and garner hundreds of entries.

Gavin Williamson chose the latter route, despite having had a busier year than most having been appointed the Government's Chief Whip by Theresa May.

The winning design, by Amelie Moseley from Corbett CE Primary School, Bobbington, features a London bus, a snowman and the ubiquitous Elizabeth Tower, which houses Big Ben.

It will be sent out to around 700 people, although Mr Williamson is taking extra care not to forget his own parents as he did last year.

"I sent all the cards out but completely forgot to send my mum and dad one," he said.

"This year I'm determined to make sure everyone gets one, although I've already signed so many of them I feel like my right hand's about to fall off."

## Adorned

Labour's Emma Reynolds launched a competition for pupils at eight schools. Of the hundreds of entries the Wolverhampton North East MP picked a design by Kit Lewis, 10, who attends Perry Hall Primary School.

The card, which features a drawing of a Christmas tree adorned with a star, has been sent out to more than 600 people.

Ms Reynolds said: "I think the image is very striking. This was the biggest competition I have ever run and the standard of entries was the best yet."

Dudley North MP Ian Austin sends out hundreds of Christmas cards, with the Queen and the Prime Minister among the recipients.

After a contest among local school children that garnered hundreds of entries, Charleigh Finch of Bramford Primary School produced the winning design that adorns the front of his card.

The winning entry shows a Christmas scene with Santa flying over with Dudley Castle.

Mr Austin presented Charleigh with her chosen prize at a school assembly. He said: "It was a huge privilege to go to Bramford Primary and present her with an award for her design skills."

Runners up could choose from early Christmas gifts including a family ticket to Dudley Zoo and Castle, a family ticket to the Black Country Museum and gift vouchers for Hobbycraft.

Halesowen and Rowley Regis MP James Morris, who has been busy hitting the streets with the local Rotary club's charity sleigh, ran a contest among local school children for the sixth consecutive year and had 600 entries to sift through.

The winning card was designed by Year 6 pupil Ruby Field, from Our Lady & St Kenelm Primary School, Halesowen, and features a family gathering around a Christmas tree. Mr Morris



Aldridge-Brownhills MP Wendy Morton's card features a photograph of a wintery Pelsall Common with a gaggle of geese in the snow, taken by Steve Swain of Walsall Wood Camera Club



MP James Morris, with pupil Ruby Field and her winning design

said: "This is the fifth year that I have asked local primary schools to design my Christmas card and I am always impressed with the quality and variety of entries."

"Well done to Ruby and to the runners-up, as well as to everybody who sent in such fantastic entries, and a big thank you to all of the teachers and staff who encouraged their classes to take part."

Dudley South's Tory MP Mike Wood opened up his competition to pupils at all primary and special school pupils in his constituency.

And in a novel twist, he put the best seven entries up online for members of the public to vote on. The winner was Alex Maher, a Year 5 pupil at Maidensbridge Primary School, Wall Heath, who impressed the MP with his drawing of a Robin in a Santa hat. Warley MP

John Spellar got creative with his card this year. He used a picture of Elizabeth Tower, with a Christmas tree in the foreground, and enhanced it using Photoshop.

Aldridge-Brownhills MP Wendy Morton went with a local theme for her card. It features a photograph of a wintery Pelsall Common with a gaggle of geese wandering by through the snow.

The shot was taken by Steve Swain of Walsall Wood Camera Club, while Walsall North MP David Winnick has sent out one of the Commons' official selection cards chosen by the Commons Speaker John Bercow.

His colleague in Walsall South, Valerie Vaz, also picked a card with a parliamentary theme.

The shadow leader of the House of Commons' card features a photograph of a beau-



Another traditional Christmas card sent out by Pat McFadden and Valerie Vaz



Wolverhampton MP Rob Marri's traditional Christmas card

tifully decorated tree in Old Palace Yard with Elizabeth Tower in the background.

"It's such an iconic image," she said. "A lot of staff gave up a Sunday for free to put all the lights on the tree, which I think was a wonderful gesture."

Wolverhampton South East MP Pat McFadden sent the same card. He said: "It is a wonderful time of year, but it can get quite exhausting when you have about 700 cards to send."

Wolverhampton MP Rob Marri chose a striking image of the Houses of Parliament for his card.

Meanwhile Labour may have accused Philip Hammond of barking up the wrong tree with his Autumn Statement, but the Chancellor has shown he can bite back with an adorable card featuring his two mutts, Rex and Oscar.



# Failure to intervene in Syria a 'catastrophic failure' – MP

THE western powers not intervening in Syria represented 'a catastrophic failure' of policy that has led to dire consequences for the world, according to a Black Country Tory MP.

Halesowen and Rowley Regis MP James Morris backed comments from fellow MPs that Britain should 'feel a sense of sorrow, shame and anger' about its failure to deal with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

The Commons voted against military action against Assad in August 2013, before voting to join a coalition of nations conducting airstrikes against ISIS militants in Syria last December.

Mr Morris made his comments during an emergency debate on the bloodshed that has happened in the Syrian civil war, leading to the siege of east Aleppo this month.

A group of MPs, led by Andrew Mitchell, called on the Government to pursue a ceasefire in Aleppo, where four years of vicious fighting have seen thousands killed.

Mr Mitchell argued that Britain is 'complicit' in the suffering faced by Syrians, and that humanitarian help is desperately needed.

Tory MP Mr Morris told the Commons that when historians look back on the current situation in Aleppo it will represent 'a catastrophic failure of western policy that has significantly changed the world for the worse'.

He added that it was 'inevitable' that 'a distinct reckoning, will come at some point for the United Kingdom and the USA.

The Syrian president looks likely to cling on to power in Syria, largely thanks to Russian support.



Halesowen and Rowley Regis MP James Morris speaking during the emergency debate

# New ambulances roll out across region

HI-TECH ambulances labelled 'the most sophisticated emergency vehicles in the world' are being rolled out in the Black Country as part of a £21 million upgrade.

West Midlands Ambulance Service is launching 66 new ambulances. The fleet of Fiat Ducatos, some of which are already in use, are fitted with CCTV and will be cheaper to run, say bosses.

The vehicles are made using lightweight materials. The back doors have been fitted with hydraulic rams to make them easier to open and close. Improved air suspension will provide a better ride and handling.

A new touch screen operates the lighting, CCTV and climate control.

Tony Page, WMAS Fleet General Manager, added: "By using construction methods used in aircraft manufacture we are providing our patients and staff with a quieter and warmer working area.

"The techniques used mean the vehicles are lighter which will improve the handling and reduce fuel and maintenance costs, allowing us to invest even more into frontline clinical care."

# Former cinema is back on the market

THERE are hopes that films could once again be shown at a former cinema on Stourbridge's Lower High Street.

The old Savoy Cinema building, which opened as a movie theatre in the 1920s, is back on the market.

The building sold in February but is now back on the market, being offered for £600,000.

It is now hoped a group will come forward with the aim of re-opening the building as a cinema.

The Savoy closed as a cinema in 1982 after more than 60 years as a picture house, originally called the Scala, and in recent decades was a club, a gym and a shop.

Stourbridge councillor Nicolas Barlow said he supported the idea of it re-opening as a cinema rather than it becoming another 'faceless' building.

He hoped it could become the focus of a campaign similar to that which saved Dudley Hippodrome and is now aiming to re-open the Castle Hill landmark as a theatre again.

Councillor Barlow said: "I know people are keen to see it re-invigorated as a niche cinema like they have in Birmingham.

"When you think of what has happened with the Hippodrome in Dudley, it would be nice if that could happen. It would be lovely but it's about getting the right people in with the right level of investment.

## Apartments

"We will have to see what the new year brings. It would be a shame if it was turned into something quite faceless like apartments."

The historic property, which contains a series of interlinked buildings, was sold for £350,000 by estate agents Walton and Hipkiss in February. As well



Former Savoy cinema

as being available to buy, it could also be rented for £64,000 a year, which may be a more attractive offer for community groups.

After it was no longer used as a cinema, the building attracted controversy as a lap-dancing club. It has also been used for retail purposes and most recently was a health and fitness club.

Its frontage has seen better days with its shutter permanently down.

The building's prominent town centre location is highlighted by Siddall Jones, which is advertising the property, in a bid to attract a buyer.

When the venue was a lap-dancing club called Heaven it attracted criticism from local politicians, while an investigation was launched after claims it breached its licence were made in a TV documentary.

## Driving home for Christmas

IT seems singer Chris Rea needed a little help 'Driving Home for Christmas' this year, and a Brierley Hill firm came to his rescue. The singer famous for that festive hit and The Road to Hell needed a rare car part for his prized original Fiat Abarth 595.

Eurolec Components Ltd were able to tick this item off his Christmas list when the final hard-to-find part was required, an original Fiat lever-type, pull-start starter motor. The Black Country firm were able to source two broken ones, and their classic re-manufacturing department got one starter motor to 'back to new' condition.

The husky-voiced singer from Middlesbrough reportedly said: "Thank you so much, looks like we will be driving home for Christmas!"

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# 16 Band of Black Country lads had 17 top 20 hits during career

Halesowen Chronicle Thursday, December 22, 2016



At the height of their fame, the foursome leaving for America



Slade later in their career in party mood



Fans meet Don at his first home on Green Park Road, Bilston



A new look after the band had left behind their skinhead days



Drummer Don Powell.

Pictures: Barry Plummer



Slade at Heathrow airport, ready to fly out in 1972



Glam rock personified, with Dave Hill's glittery look

## Slade come Bak 'Ome to celebrate 50 merry years

REPORT BY JORDAN HARRIS

**BLACK Country glam rock and roll icons Slade returned to where it all began, to look back on 50 years of glory.**

They are a band synonymous with good times whose energy-packed anthems still rattle with the same electricity as when they were first released.

Last Friday marked Slade's 50th anniversary, and to mark the milestone a show was held at The Robin 2, the live music venue in Bilston which has become the band's spiritual home over the years.

While the current Slade live experience might miss the inimitable howl of Noddy Holder on lead vocals, it has become a celebration of the band's spirit, which has always been one of its key features.

It certainly takes a lot of spirit for four young Black Country lads to visualise a life of Technicolor glam rock in front of them while rehearsing in Bilston.

But listening back to the early recordings, they prove they were hellbent on harnessing the escapist power of music in order to change their lives.

### Fashion

Once the band got its foot in the door, there was no stopping them.

Noddy Holder, Don Powell, Dave Hill and Jim Lea became household names, with songs such as Take Me Bak 'Ome and Mama Weer All Crazee Now taking them to the top of the charts.

However, it wasn't just the music that caught people's attention and sold millions of records. As the band racked up an incredible 17 consecutive top 20 hits, they became notorious for song title mis-spellings, the rock and roll attitude of its stars and a unique sense of fashion.

The greatest example of this is Noddy's famous mirrored top hat, a symbol of the excess and brashness of the times which no-one else would dare attempt to pull off.

Dave Hill also indulged with fashion excesses. He favoured silver and gold outfits with massive platform boots.

The band's best-selling single, and last number one, is the festive anthem Merry Xmas Everybody, which has become so attached to this time of year it is hard to imagine going through December without hearing it.

In a way, it is a perfect representation of the band at their peak, an unashamedly joyful song that reaches out to the masses with open arms. Their peak years were such a blaze of glory that it was inevitable that



The band at the height of their powers in the early 1970s when they were always in the charts and on Top of the Pops almost every week



In 2002 Slade received University of Wolverhampton fellowships



Noddy leading from the front as always with an outrageous tie

a dip would come and as the world around them changed and punk arrived in the 70s, their popularity began to fade. These are the times when a band's character is truly tested, after the fame and glory, without the energy of youth on their side and drained from years of touring and partying.

It wasn't long before they were back in

the hearts and minds of the public, with a performance at Reading Festival in 1980 bringing Slade to a new audience. That would be done again years later when Oasis shouted their appreciation for the band from the rooftops, even covering Cum On Feel The Noize.

Don released his autobiography Look Wot

I Dun in 2013 and his childhood home at Bilston was chosen for a visit by fans at a Slade convention in 2015.

But last Friday's show was all about looking back on the good times and the bad, reliving songs that are part of the Black Country's heritage, the fashion choices that continue to raise eyebrows and the connec-

## Look wot you dun boys – nearly two million sales in the UK



In Flame, also their movie

**IN the UK, the band has sold a certified 520,000 albums...**

Beginnings as Ambrose Slade, 1969; Play It Loud 1970; Slayed? 1972; Old New Borrowed and Blue 1974; Slade in Flame 1974; Nobody's Fools 1976.

Whatever Happened to Slade 1977; Return to Base 1979; We'll Bring the House Down 1981; Till Deaf Do Us Part 1981.

The Amazing Kamikaze Syndrome 1983, re-released in 1984. Rogues Gallery 1985; Crackers – The Christmas Party Album 1985; You Boyz Make Big

Noize 1987. Keep on Rockin' 1994 – as Slade II, re-released in 2002.

**Slade sold a staggering 1.8 million singles...**

1969, Wild Winds Are Blowing. 1970, Shape of Things to Come, Know Who You Are.

1971, Get Down and Get with It, Coz I Luv You, Look Wot You Dun.

1972, Take Me Bak 'Ome, Mama Weer All Crazee Now, Gudbuy T'Jane.

1973, Cum On Feel the Noize, Skweeze Me, Pleeze Me, My Friend Stan, Merry Xmas Everybody.

1974, Everyday, The Bangin' Man,

**Far Far Away.**

1975, How Does It Feel, Thanks for the Memory, Wham Bam Thank You Mam, In for a Penny.

1976, Let's Call It Quits, Nobody's Fool.

1977, Gypsy Roadhog, Burning in the Heat of Love, My Baby Left Me.

1978, Give Us a Goal, Rock 'n' Roll Bolero.

1979, Ginny, Ginny, I'm a Rocker, Sign of the Times, Okey Cokey.

1981, We'll Bring the House Down, Wheels Ain't Coming Down, Knuckle Sandwich Nancy, Lock Up Your

**Daughters.**

1982, Ruby Red, Rock and Roll Preacher, And Now the Waltz C'est La Vie.

1983, My Oh My, Cum On Feel the Noize, re-issue.

1984, Run Runaway, Slam the Hammer Down, All Join Hands.

1985, 7 Year Bitch, Myzsterious Mizster Jones, Little Sheila, Do You Believe in Miracles.

1987, Still the Same, That's What Friends Are For, You Boyz Make Big Noize, Ooh La La in LA, We Won't Give In.

1988, Let's Dance '88'.



One of Slade's biggest hits



# Ladies' gym wins top fitness award

A GYM for women in the Black Country has been named a winner at a prestigious fitness industry awards ceremony.

Fitness 4 Ladies in Castle Hill, Dudley, beat strong competition and was crowned Ladies Only Gym of the Year at the National Fitness Awards.

The awards, now in their seventh year, recognise excellence and achievement in the fitness business.

To scoop the trophy, the gym went through a rigorous assessment process, which involved being visited by a member of a workout team who examine all areas of the business, from member retention to customer service.

## Support

Owner Raj Kaur, said: "It's an absolute privilege to be recognized nationally for all of our hard work.

"We couldn't have done it without the support of our team and members over

the past six and a half years. It was a complete surprise when they named our gym ladies gym of the year and we're all really pleased with the win."

Awards were handed out in more 20 categories at a glittering ceremony at Leicester Athena, attended by more than 850 people and hosted by boxing legend Ricky Hatton and TV celebrity Katie Bulmer-Cooke.

Judith Halkerston, National Fitness Awards' director: "This years winners should be very, very proud.

"The high standard of entries made it a tough job to select a final shortlist never mind a winner and runner-up in each category.

"Our awards' night was a great celebration of the fitness industry as a whole and it was great to see so many gyms represented at the event.

"It was a wonderful evening and it was lovely to share in the celebrations of the winners."



The award-winning team from the Fitness 4 Ladies gym at Castle Hill, Dudley, led by business owner Raj Kaur

# Minister promises more Midlands road and railway projects

THE Government is committed to boosting infrastructure in a bid to ensure the West Midlands maintains its position as a major part of the UK's economy, says Brexit Minister David Jones.

During a visit to the Black Country, Mr Jones said the Government was 'fully aware' of the need for major improvements to the region's road network, adding that key developments were in the pipeline.

He met with members of the Black Country Chamber of Commerce's Brexit Policy Group at Carvers, Wolverhampton, where his comments were welcomed by business bosses.

They urged Mr Jones to make sure the West Midlands is not left behind in Downing Street's plans for post-Brexit Britain.

## Concern

Mr Jones said: "It is clear that transport is a major area of concern in the West Midlands. We understand the importance of improvements and it is an issue that we will be looking at closely. This is particularly true for the road infrastructure, with the M6 Toll, and also upgrading routes to and from Birmingham Airport."

Mr Jones said the Government would be announcing some major developments for the West Midlands as part of a £2 billion investment for infrastructure upgrades that was announced in the Autumn Statement.

"We have got some major pieces that we are pursuing, including HS2. There will be more projects to be announced in future following consultation."

# Report is by 'snobbish southerners' says Tory MP

DECADES of unemployment helped to turn the West Midlands into 'Britain's Brexit capital', according to a new report from an independent think-tank.

The London-based Resolution Foundation says a history of job shortages played a significant role in the huge support for Brexit across the West Midlands.

But Government Chief Whip, South Staffs MP Gavin Williamson, has branded the report 'deeply flawed'.

The analysis found that the region delivered the strongest vote to leave the EU of anywhere in the UK. Dudley, Sandwell and Walsall posted some of the biggest Leave votes nationally.

The foundation has called on the Government to 're-calibrate' its Midlands Engine project so it has more focus on boosting employment.

It claims the region entered the economic downturn with the lowest employment rate of any major UK region and employment prospects in the region only improved 'at a glacial pace' in recent years.

"The West Midlands now has the lowest employment rate of any major city region at just 64.5 per cent," the report says.

Kinver MP Mr Williamson said: "In the West Midlands we are seeing the largest growth in private sector employment in 20 years, with more and more people entering the workplace.

"The quality of employ-



Gavin Williamson MP

ment is also fantastic, with major companies such as JLR, UTC and Gestamp investing more than £1 billion into South Staffordshire and Wolverhampton.

"The findings in this report appear to be deeply flawed. It seems that this is an example of snobbish southerners deciding to make generalisations about the region. People here voted for Brexit because they had real concerns over a number of issues that impact on their futures."

# Former labourer is on course for career at sea

A 20-year-old from Dudley is on course for a career at sea having completed the first stage of his Royal Navy training.

Trainee seaman specialist Louis Ralston joined the service in October, arriving at HMS Raleigh, Cornwall, for his basic training. He has now completed an intensive 10-week course.

The former High Arcal pupil previously worked as a labourer and in a fast-food restaurant while studying at college. He said: "I joined the Royal Navy for new challenges and to travel the world. I've learnt a lot about myself."

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# Tips to help keep festive pot plants at their best

Hannah Stephenson offers tips on how to keep a festive favourite looking its best

POINSETTIAS are the symbol of Christmas, their traditional red bracts bringing festive cheer to the home – and now Poinsettias come in a range of colours, including light pinks and creams, which would complement more subtle decor.

Some six million plants are sold in the UK in just three weeks in the run-up to Christmas Day, with 80 per cent snapped up in the final shopping weekend, according to grower group the British Protected Ornamentals Association.

Caroline Marshall-Foster, editor of The Florist magazine, suggests an alternative way of decorating with poinsettia is to arrange a row of them in simple copper-coloured pots along the mantelpiece or the windowsill, or to dot a few potted poinsettias among lush green garlands of pine and spruce.

Celebrity florist Larry Walsh says that using metallic-coloured containers can instantly add a hint of Christmas luxury to your poinsettia.

“A bit of sparkle makes Christmas. Accessorise your arrangement with gold-leafed candles and glassware and you have the perfect festive table decoration.”

Yet so often poinsettias wilt before the Christmas guests start arriving. So, how do you keep them going?

1. Make sure you buy a healthy plant whose roots are not spilling out through the base of the pot.

Check where it is located when you buy it because plants that have been stood outdoors a long time may fail.

Unwrap them as soon as you get them home.

2. Place them in a light spot, but not in direct sunlight.

If direct sunlight hits the plant, reposition it.

Poinsettias should be kept warm, ideally between 13-22C. Don't place them in draughts and avoid cool rooms.

3. The most common cause of failure is over-watering.

Let the upper half of the compost become dry before watering thoroughly.

This may mean letting the water drain away and then watering it again.

Don't let them stand in water.

4. Mist the leaves frequently as poinsettias (Euphorbia pulcherrima), which are native to Mexico and Central America, need moist air.

5. If your poinsettia starts to wilt and is as dry as a bone, soak the rootball in warm water, which may revive it.

As well as the traditional red varieties, you can also buy poinsettias in pink and white or with lighter green leaves. Try the stunning white Princetia 'Pure White', a new addition to the Thomson & Morgan range (£14.99, [www.thompson-morgan.com](http://www.thompson-morgan.com)) or the popular cream type 'Regina'.

If poinsettias just don't take your fancy and you'd like to try something new, alternatives include the Christmas cactus, hippeastrum and orchid. Two new orchids, Phalaenopsis Purple Princess – a dainty type with two to three flower spikes which produce a spray of 3-4cm mauve flowers - and Phalaenopsis 'Kleopatra 4' – which has cream flowers with intensely deep purple spots - have recently received the RHS Award of Garden Merit.

For more information on poinsettias, visit [www.christmas-star.info](http://www.christmas-star.info)

## BEST OF THE BUNCH – Holly

This evergreen shrub is another Christmas must-have, its bright berries adding festive cheer to a plethora of indoor decorations.

But it is also a valuable shrub in the garden and you can get unusual and more decorative varieties including variegated types with gold or silver-splashed green foliage, as well as types with yellow, orange or black berries.

Nearly all types are male or female, so you'll need one of each to ensure berries unless you have neighbours who also grow holly in close proximity in their garden.

The most popular type, Ilex aquifolium, is an upright shrub with 5-10cm long leaves. The male variety 'Golden Queen' offers green leaves with gold splashes, while the female 'Argentea Marginata' has white-edged leaves. Holly will thrive in any reasonable garden soil in full sun or partial shade. If you are growing holly as a hedge, trim it in spring.



Euonymus will grow in all sorts of soils in both sun and partial shade

# All-year shrub will bring colour to winter gardens

## BEST OF THE BUNCH – Euonymus

WHILE the deciduous varieties of euonymus, such as E. alatus, grown for its red autumn foliage, evergreen varieties of this shrub are invaluable, both to add all-year interest in the border and as a great contrasting feature in winter pots, alongside winter heathers, pansies and dwarf conifers.

Euonymus will grow in all sorts of soils in both sun and partial shade. Variegated types are the most noticeable, including E. japonicus 'Aureopictus', which has yellow leaves with a green rim and 'Ovatus Aureus', which has a yellow rim. As well as making great ground cover plants, some types can be used as climbers, clinging like ivy, such as the silver-edged variety E. fortunei 'Silver Queen', which reaches up to 3m (10ft) against a wall, while other tall-growing specimens can be used for hedging. Variegated types prefer full sun and little or no pruning is required.

## GOOD ENOUGH TO EAT - Windowsill herbs

YOUR herb garden may be looking a bit sorry for itself at this time of year, but you can still

have the fresh taste of herbs by growing some on your windowsill indoors.

If you have mint or chives in the garden, dig up some roots to force on a warm windowsill. Soon enough, they will start growing again. For a really easy life, buy pots of fresh herbs from the supermarket and they should keep growing if you water them and keep cutting them little and often. It's also easy to grow herbs indoors from seed, including annuals such as chervil, coriander, basil and parsley. Just sow them thinly in pots and let them grow.

## WHAT TO DO THIS WEEK

:: Plant bare-root and container grown roses and transplant any established roses you want to reside.

:: Create an inexpensive hedge by taking hardwood cuttings and inserting them directly into the growing site.

:: Prune autumn-flowering shrubs over three years old as they finish flowering.

:: Drain surface pumps in the pond and have them serviced if necessary. Or else clean, dry and grease before storing.

# Planning ahead is sure to bring rich rewards

By Hannah Stephenson

**CREATING a vegetable patch, whether on a large piece of ground or within a smaller raised bed, can bring rich rewards if you plan carefully.**

Growing compatible crops together is likely to reap richer harvests, while not treading soil from one bed to another and keeping your tools clean between use will help keep soil healthy and reduce the likelihood of the spread of pests and diseases.

The idea behind crop rotation is that you avoid planting the same crop in the same bit of ground more than one year in four to stop root diseases building up and to make the most of resources such as manure, which is only needed for certain crops but not for others (like root crops).

Crops which can be grown together include legumes (peas and beans), comprising peas and broad, French and runner beans; the onion family, including garlic, leeks, onions, shallots and spring onions; roots and tubers, including carrots, parsnips, beetroot, potatoes and tomatoes; and brassicas (cabbage family), featuring Brussels sprouts, cabbages, Chinese greens, pak choi, radish, cauliflowers, swedes and turnips.

Green veg which require regular watering can be separated from less thirsty root crops, lettuces are often grown with cabbage family crops as they need organic matter, nitrogen fertiliser and regular watering.

Perennial veg like rhubarb and asparagus are best kept out of crop rotation beds.

## Nutrients

Squeeze quick-growing crops of lettuce and other salad leaves wherever they will fit, using them as a catch crop between slower-growing types such as winter brassicas.

By swapping the main groups of vegetables around in a regular order, you can make best use of the nutrients in the soil because different crops need different amounts of nutrients.

If you're starting a new plot or creating raised vegetable beds, prepare the ground thoroughly, digging to break up compacted soil and weeding thoroughly.

Then add bulky organic matter before planting season starts. It may be better to do this in spring, using compost as a surface mulch.

If you have an existing vegetable plot, dig it over each winter, inverting lumps of soil to bury annual weeds, but leave the clods intact. Frost and rain will break them down and leave a crumbly soil by spring.

On light, sandy soils, wait until spring before digging. Sandy soils may also need liming regularly to give them a neutral pH. If in doubt, buy a soil tester to test the pH of your soil.

The four-year rotation is a good technique which is easy to plan. Divide your plot into four separate sections if you have space, and then operate a four-year rotation on each.



The idea behind crop rotation is that you avoid planting the same crop in the same bit of ground more than one year in four



If you have an existing vegetable plot, dig it over each winter

A typical example might be:

**Year One**  
Plot A - potatoes  
Plot B - onions and roots  
Plot C - pea family  
Plot D - Cabbage family  
**Year Two**  
Plot A - pea family  
Plot B - cabbage family  
Plot C - onions and roots  
Plot D - potatoes

**Year Three**  
Plot A - cabbage family  
Plot B - onions and roots  
Plot C - potatoes  
Plot D - pea family  
**Year Four**  
Plot A - onions and roots  
Plot B - potatoes  
Plot C - pea family  
Plot D - cabbage family  
On smaller plots, conventional crop rota-



Keeping tools clean will help keep soil healthy

tion is not practical, so just aim not to grow the same crop on the same patch of ground any more often than you need to.

Separate the main crop groups as far as possible.

Grow potatoes, onions and the cabbage family on a different area each year and fit other crops around them.

Keep a yearly plan as to what crops you have grown where – and you won't go far wrong.



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Ian Adams' superb Widow Twankey wore a succession of outrageous costumes that seemed to defy gravity



Most of the laughs come courtesy of Adam C Booth as Aladdin's brother, the accident-prone Wishee Washee

# Am yam ready? Panto fun wish has come true

**WHAT a Grand panto... oh yes it is! If you're looking for a festive feast of fun with magical music and tremendous tricks, then the Grand's genie of the lamp will make your wish come true.**

It is without doubt the Lichfield Street theatre's best seasonal show for years with a perfect balance of TV talent and seasoned stage performers.

And a star is born... she yam what she yam-yam but 'lazy' Doreen Tipton comes close to stealing the show as the Empress of China. Apparently she had to apply for the

Empress job to keep her benefits and was rather dismayed to get the gig.

Sometimes it means she has to get up before 2pm or miss the Jeremy Kyle show.

With a Black Country accent so thick it could plug the cut, she was an instant hit with panto-goers.

And I suspect Gill Jordan's comic creation will be in demand in panto land (at least in the West Midlands) for years to come.

Joe McDerry is a suitably handsome and dashing Aladdin, and those who saw him on The X Factor, Popstar To Operastar or on stage in Joseph know he has an excellent singing voice.

Further fine vocals come from Britain's Got Talent fi-

nalist Lucy Kay as Princess Jasmine and Neal Wright as an American-accented Genie of the Lamp.

Most of the laughs come courtesy of Adam C Booth as Aladdin's brother, the accident-prone Wishee Washee, and Ian Adams' superb Widow Twankey.

The scene where the pair get shrunk in the wash was priceless. As Aladdin's washer woman mom, Adams wore a succession of outrageous costumes that seemed to defy gravity.

And all three of the Twankeys did defy gravity on a stunning magic carpet scene in which Aladdin loops the loop over the heads of a marvelling audience.

Stefan Pejic's Abanazar is an eminently hissable villain in the booming Tom Baker mode, gold-clad Lisa Riley makes for a wisecracking ballroom-dancing Slave of the Ring and CBeebies favourite Ben Faulks is the slapstick PC Ping Pong.

Add a troupe of energetic dancers and a soundtrack full of pop and showtune favourites, and you've got one Christmas cracker of a show.

It's on at the Grand until January 22.

**LEON BURAKOWSKI**



A star is born... she yam what she yam-yam but 'lazy' Doreen Tipton comes close to stealing the show as the Empress of China



Neal Wright as an American-accented Genie of the Lamp



# Snowbody could better this duet

THE Snowman returns to Birmingham Repertory Theatre in the New Year to delight young and old alike from January 11 to 15, with its wonderful mix of storytelling, spectacle, music and magic.

For the first time this year the show will feature a new recording of the iconic song Walking in the Air in which the adult Aled Jones duets with his younger self, in a new arrangement by composer Howard Blake.

The new arrangement features on Aled's latest album One Voice at Christmas, which recently reached number one in the Classic FM charts, and will now also feature in The Snowman on stage.

Aled Jones said: "Walking in the Air caps off such a great year for me and I'm thrilled to give it a new lease of life. Who knows, maybe we'll get to the top of the Christmas chart again!"

Howard Blake said: "This is a unique theatrical event whereby through the wonders of technology one can hear Aled at the age of 12 singing with Aled as the tenor he is now. I am delighted that we can include it in the show."

Based on the book by Raymond Briggs and the film directed by Diane Jackson, the stage show has transported generations of children and their families into the wintry world of a boy and his magical snowman.

The Birmingham Rep production features music and lyrics by Howard Blake performed by a live orchestra,



The Snowman at Birmingham Rep is a traditional wintertime family treat

choreography by Robert North, direction by Bill Alexander, design by Ruari Murchison and lighting by Tim Mitchell.

The enchanting show tells the story of a young boy's adventures when his snowman comes miraculously to life on Christmas Eve. Featuring a daz-

zling array of colourful characters including dancing penguins, magical reindeer, a beautiful snow princess, her wicked beau Jack Frost and of course, Father Christmas himself.

The Snowman is a Christmas treat for all the family and a perfect introduction to theatre for the very young.

# Fuller sound for Fall Girl

A SINGER-SONGWRITER has released her first self-produced album. Michelle Sciarrotta, who performs under the name Fall Girl, released debut album Arcana on digital platforms including iTunes, Spotify and Amazon this month.

She says the 11-track album, which was recorded, written and produced in her home studio, gave her a chance to experiment with different styles.

It acts as an expansion to her stripped back live sets, with songs she performs in front of audiences using just her voice and acoustic guitar fleshed out with keyboards, drums and more.

Michelle, originally from Coventry, said: "This has been the first major project I have put together on my own, which is something I have quite enjoyed. It is daunting, because there are times when you miss working with other people. But what you get is the clearest representation of the sound you want in your head, it is less of a committee thing."

## Record

Michelle is a classically-trained musician who makes her living from performing, not only as Fall Girl but under her own name with a covers set, as well as working with other musicians including former Wolfsbane rocker Blaze Bayley.

A launch event for physical copies of Arcana was held at record shop Vinyl & Vintage, on Cleveland Street in Wolverhampton. Michelle will play her final show of the year as Fall Girl on December 27 at The Jam House in Birmingham. For more information on Fall Girl, visit [www.facebook.com/fallgirlmusic](http://www.facebook.com/fallgirlmusic) or see [fallgirl.net](http://fallgirl.net)



## Make arena dates with rock legends

CLASSIC rock fans can add major gigs in Birmingham to their 2017 diaries. School's Out rocker Alice Cooper will be at the Barclaycard Arena on November 14 with The Mission and The Tubes. Before that, his shock rock rivals Kiss, fronted by Gene Simmons, play the Barclaycard Arena on May 8.

Ritchie Blackmore's Rainbow are at the NEC Genting Arena on June 28 and his former colleagues bring Deep Purple to the Barclaycard Arena on November 17. The Who perform Tommy and more at the Barclaycard Arena April 12 and Black Sabbath say farewell at the Genting Arena on February 2 and 4.

## Osmonds join Brum festivities

JIMMY Osmond brings his brothers Merrill and Jay to Birmingham Town Hall on Friday in tribute to the late crooner Andy Williams, who launched The Osmonds with his Christmas Extravaganza TV shows.

The festive variety show will also feature Britain's Got Talent ventriloquist Steve Hewlett and singer Charlie Green.

Also on Friday night, singers Laura Tebbutt and Tim Howar join Capital Voices and London Concert Orchestra for White Christmas at the Symphony Hall. The same venue hosts Christmas By Candlelight with the Mozart Festival Orchestra on Christmas Eve afternoon.

## Musical nostalgia with tribute bands

GET the festivities going with the sounds of three decades ago with tribute act Kick Up The 80s at Bilston's Robin 2 venue on Friday. Or join The Upbeat Beatles for a Christmas Eve tribute to the Fab Four at the Robin on Saturday.

Also coming up at the Mount Pleasant venue are Thin Lizzy tribute Limehouse Lizzy on Boxing Day night, ska legends Bad Manners on Tuesday and The Dirty DC tribute to Aussie rockers AC/DC on Wednesday.

Turn the clock back to Madchester in the 90s for a triple tribute featuring Definitely Maybe, Adored and Happy Mondays on Thursday (Dec 29).



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CHOICE



**Shirley Bassey**

**David Walliams Celebrates Dame Shirley Bassey (BBC1, 9pm)**

They say that parody is the highest form of flattery. If that's the case, Shirley Bassey should be thrilled to bits by the way in which David Walliams and Matt Lucas paid homage to her during their late-1990s show Rock Profiles – Lucas played the great Dame as a diva claiming to have had more hits than she actually has. Not that the girl from Tiger Bay is exactly short of career-defining songs, having performed three 007 title numbers as well as plenty of other show-stopping tunes (her rendition of Big Spender remains definitive, for instance). She turns 80 in January, and to celebrate that landmark, she shares the stage with Walliams, one of her biggest fans.

BBC1

**6.00 Breakfast. 10.00** Saturday Kitchen. **11.30 Film:** A Christmas Carol. (2009) **1.00** BBC News: Weather. **1.15** Winter: Earth's Seasonal Secrets. **2.15** Film: The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian. (2008) **4.30** Shrek the Halls. (R) **4.50** Film: Penguins of Madagascar. (2014) **6.15** BBC News. **6.25** **Regional Programme.** **6.30** **Pointless Celebrities.** Alexander Armstrong and Richard Osman present a Christmas special of the general knowledge quiz, with Lesley Joseph, Duncan James, Faye Tozer, Bobby Davro and Joe Pasquale. **7.25** **Michael McIntyre's Big Christmas Show.** Michael puts a festive spin on his weekend variety entertainment show, with live performances by Alfie Boe, Michael Ball, Catherine Tate and Harry Enfield. **8.25** **EastEnders.** Phil is given some tough love by both Shirley and Denise, Linda receives devastating family news and Dot closes up for the final time. Donna is touched by a dinner invitation. **9.00** **David Walliams Celebrates Dame Shirley Bassey.** The comedy actor hosts this special evening of entertainment in which the veteran singer performs some of her best-loved songs and looks back on her 60 years in showbusiness. **10.05** **Peter Kay's Christmas Comedy Shuffle.** A festive collection of clips from the comedian's TV career, featuring highlights from Car Share and Phoenix Nights, as well as a seasonal singalong with Paul McCartney. **10.50** **The Vicar of Dibley.** Alice suggests an unconventional nativity play starring herself and Hugo as Mary and Joseph, and adds an extra touch of authenticity by going into labour mid-performance. (R) **11.30** BBC News: Weather; National Lottery Update. **11.45** **Midnight Mass: from St Chad's Birmingham.** The Most Rev Bernard Longley, Archbishop of Birmingham, leads a Christmas Eve Midnight Mass broadcast live from St Chad's Cathedral. **1.00** Film: Surviving Christmas. (2004) **2.25** Weather for the Week Ahead. **2.30** BBC News.

BBC2

**6.15** **Film:** Mars Needs Moms. (2011) Animated sci-fi adventure, with the voice of Seth Robert Dusky. **7.40** The NFL Show. (R) **8.10** **Film:** Hans Christian Andersen. (1952) Musical, starring Danny Kaye. **10.00** Robot Wars. (R) **11.00** Wallace & Gromit: A Close Shave. (R) **11.30** Nigella's Christmas Kitchen. (R) **12.00** The Cook Who Changed Our Lives. (R) **1.00** Film: Splash! (1984) Romantic fantasy comedy, with Tom Hanks and Daryl Hannah. **2.45** Snow Chick: A Penguin's Tale. (R) **3.45** Gorilla Family and Me. (R) **4.45** Gorilla Family and Me. (R) **5.45** Carols from King's. **7.00** **Dad's Army.** The platoon challenges a rival regiment to a gruelling duel, involving map-reading, initiative tests, river-crossing and field-fighting, to prove they are fitter and better trained than any other troop. Vintage comedy with the bumbling Home Guard of Walmington-on-Sea, starring Arthur Lowe, John Le Mesurier and Ian Lavender. (R) **8.00** **Alan Bennett's Diaries.** A candid profile of the writer, following him in his home village in Yorkshire, to his community library in Primrose Hill and during a trip to New York. In a series of intimate encounters filmed over the period of a year, he reflects on his modest beginnings and his enduring gratitude to a Welfare State that paid for his education and looked after his parents in their old age. **9.00** **Film: The Lady in the Van.** (2015) Premiere. The true story of writer Alan Bennett's friendship with an eccentric homeless woman, whom he befriended in the 1970s before allowing her to park her dilapidated Bedford van outside his Camden home, where she ended up staying for 15 years. Comedy-drama, starring Maggie Smith, Alex Jennings, Roger Allam and Jim Broadbent. **10.40** **The National Lottery Live.** The all-important winning numbers are revealed. **10.50** **Christmas TOTP2 Special.** Mark Radcliffe presents festive performances from the Top of the Pops archive, including classics by Slade, Wham!, Wizard, East 17, Mud, the Jackson 5 and Johnny Mathis. (R) **12.20** **Film:** Viva Las Vegas. (1964) **1.40** Sign Zone: Countryside. (R) **2.40** Holby City. (R) **3.40** This Is BBC Two. Preview of upcoming programmes.

ITV

**6.00** CITV: Grizzly Tales for Gruesome Kids. **6.20** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **6.35** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **6.45** Super 4. (R) **6.55** Signed Stories. (R) **7.05** Sooty. (R) **7.10** Oddbods. (R) **7.15** Oddbods. (R) **7.25** Nerds & Monsters. (R) **7.40** Nerds & Monsters. (R) **7.55** Horrid Henry. (R) **8.10** Horrid Henry. (R) **8.25** Weekend at Christmas. **9.25** Thunderbirds Are Go. **9.50** The Chase. (R) **10.50** You've Been Framed! With Bells On. (R) **11.20** Film: Despicable Me. (2010) **1.20** ITV News: Weather. **1.30** Film: Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone. (2001) Fantasy adventure, starring Daniel Radcliffe. **4.20** Film: One Hundred and One Dalmatians. (1961) Disney animated adventure, with the voice of Betty Lou Gerson. **6.00** **Regional Programme:** Weather. **6.15** **ITV News:** Weather. **6.30** **Blankety Blank.** David Walliams presents a one-off special revival of the 1970s game show in which contestants and a panel of celebrities must identify the missing word in a phrase. **7.30** **Coronation Street.** Aidan admits to Johnny he is in love with Maria while she heads to court, and Nick feels left out as Peter and Leanne reflect on old times. **8.00** **Birds of a Feather.** Sharon, Tracy and Dorian head to Morocco to track down Travis when he goes missing while on his gap year. Comedy, starring Pauline Quirke, Linda Robson and Lesley Joseph. **9.00** **Granthamster Christmas Special.** It's the week before Christmas, and Sidney and Georgie are drawn into a case with echoes of an unsolved murder from nine years previously when a bride-to-be reports the disappearance of her groom on their wedding day. Drama set in the 1950s, starring James Norton, Robson Green, Morven Christie and Al Weaver. **10.30** **Through the Keyhole.** Keith Lemon hosts a Christmas special of the game show, as celebrity panelists Shayne Ward, Kelly Brook and Johnny Vegas are asked to identify the homes of the rich and famous. **11.30** **ITV News:** Weather. **11.45** **Christmas Carols on TV.** Aled Jones joins the congregation of St Chad's church in Rochdale. **12.40** All Star Mr & Mrs Christmas Special. (R) **1.30** Film: Carry On Loving. (1970) **3.05** ITV Nightscreen.

CHANNEL 4

**6.15** Olive, the Other Reindeer. (R) **7.05** **Film:** A Turtle's Tale: Sammy's Adventures. (2010) **8.40** Father Christmas. (R) **9.10** Painting the Bear Hunt. **9.15** Christmas Brunch. **12.15** Jamie's Ultimate Christmas. (R) **1.15** The Simpsons. (R) **1.45** The Simpsons. (R) **2.15** The Simpsons. (R) **2.45** **Film:** Scrooged. (1988) Christmas comedy, starring Bill Murray. **4.40** Channel 4 News. **4.45** The Snowman. (R) **5.15** The Snowman and the Snowdog. (R) **5.50** **Film:** The Muppet Christmas Carol. (1992) Puppet comedy, starring Michael Caine. **7.30** **We're Going on a Bear Hunt.** Animated adventure, based on Michael Rosen's popular children's story of the same name, featuring the voices of Olivia Colman, Pam Ferris and Mark Williams. **8.00** **Gogglebox Christmas Special.** Young TV viewers appraise the year's television programmes in this festive edition, from big news stories about the American Presidential election to TV's most popular hits, including Strictly Come Dancing, First Dates and Planet Earth II. **9.00** **8 Out of 10 Cats Does Countdown Christmas Special.** Jimmy Carr hosts a festive edition of the comedy panel show, with guests Kathy Burke and Russell Howard joining Sean Lock and Jon Richardson. With Joe Lycett and Joe Wilkinson. **10.00** **Rude Tube Christmas Cracker 2016.** Alex Zane and his canine companion Bah Hum-Pug present some of the most popular seasonal internet videos, including a rocket-powered reindeer and a Christmas message from Björk. **11.00** **Tricker Happy Christmas Special.** Don Joly returns with a festive edition of the hidden-camera show, featuring new characters alongside the "big mobile man", who now has a smartphone with apps and video-calling. **11.30** **The Inbetweeners.** The gang goes on the infamous sociology and geography field trip to Swanage, and Will takes a shine to new girl Lauren – but she is only interested in Simon. (R) **12.05** The Inbetweeners. (R) **1.30** Friday Night Dinner. (R) **2.25** The Last Leg Christmas Special. (R) **3.20** My Crazy Christmas Lights. (R) **4.10** Location, Location, Location. (R) **5.05** The Restoration Man. (R) **5.55** Prep & Landing. (R)

CHANNEL 5

**6.00** Milkshake! **8.30** SpongeBob SquarePants. **9.05** **Film:** Doctor Zhivago. (1965) **12.50** **Film:** The Vikings. (1958) Historical adventure, starring Kirk Douglas and Tony Curtis. **3.05** **Film:** Jason and the Argonauts. (1963) Fantasy adventure, starring Todd Armstrong. **5.10** **Film:** Scroogie – A Christmas Carol. (1951) Charles Dickens' fantasy, starring Alastair Sim. **6.55** **Andre Rieu: Christmas in London.** A festive concert given by the Dutch violinist and the Johann Strauss Orchestra in 2015, featuring Christmas carols, popular classical pieces and songs including Leonard Cohen's Hallelujah and the Concierto de Aranjuez. **8.00** **The Yorkshire Vet at Christmas.** The veterinary documentary series concludes with a festive trip to Skeldale. Elderly farmer Jean, one of the show's most colourful characters, makes a Christmas cake with ingredients that have been "maturing" for seven years, and vet Peter Wright fears the worst when he is called to tend to a cow that has collapsed. Back at the surgery, Julian Norton has to make a difficult decision regarding Barney, a spaniel with a huge, fast-growing tumour on his leg. The residents of Thirsk plan to mark James Herriot's centenary by inviting his successors to turn on the town's Christmas lights, but Julian and Peter face a more daunting challenge when they are asked to help find a donkey for the town square nativity scene. Last in the series. **9.00** **Eamonn & Ruth: A Million Pound Christmas.** Eamonn Holmes and Ruth Langford discover the most expensive ways in which people can enjoy the season of goodwill, beginning by sampling a £10,000 advent calendar. **10.00** **Greatest Ever Christmas Movies.** Countdown of the best festive films, from It's a Wonderful Life to Bad Santa. Featuring contributions by Gremlins star Zach Galligan and Miracle on 34th Street's Mara Wilson. (R) **12.55** **Film:** Scroogie – A Christmas Carol. (1951) **1.25** SuperCasino. **4.00** The Trafford Centre: Countdown to Christmas. (R) **4.50** House Doctor. (R) **5.20** Angels of Jarm. (R) **5.25** Roary the Racing Car. (R) **5.35** Milkshake! Bop Box. (R) **5.40** Peppa Pig. (R) **5.45** Paw Patrol.

DIGITAL

**BBC Four** **7.00** All Aboard! The Sleigh Ride **9.00** Top of the Pops Christmas Hits **10.30** Roy Orbison: One of the Lonely Ones **11.30** Steptoe and Son **12.15** Top of the Pops: 1982 **1.25** Shirley Bassey at the BBC **2.25** Top of the Pops **3.55** Close **ITV2** **11.50** The Nation's Favourite Disney Song **12.50** **Film:** Santa Paws 2: The Santa Pups (2012) **2.35** **Film:** Mickey's Twice Upon a Christmas (2004) **4.00** The Smurfs: A Christmas Carol **4.25** You've Been Framed! at Christmas **5.25** Catchphrase Christmas Special **6.30** You've Been Framed! at Christmas **6.55** **Film:** The Polar Express (2004) **9.00** **Film:** Quantum of Solace (2008) **11.15** Family Guy **12.15** American Dad! **1.40** Celebrity Juice Christmas Special **2.35** **Film:** Derailed (2005) **4.20** Educating Joy: Essay: What Are You Sleighing? **5.05** Totally Bonkers Guinness World Records **5.30** Christmas Bonkers Guinness World Records **5.55** ITV2 Nightscreen **ITV3** **11.45** **Film:** Columbo: The Conspirators (1978) **1.50** Hans Christian Andersen: My Life as a Fairy Tale **3.50** The Sound of Music Live! **6.30** The Making of The Sound of Music Live **7.00** Lewis **9.00** It'll Be Alright on the Night **10.40** The Suspicions of Mr Whicher **1.05** Inspector Morse **3.00** Hans Christian Andersen: My Life as a Fairy Tale **4.40** The Darling Buds of May **5.35** ITV3 Nightscreen **ITV4** **12.10** **Film:** The Searchers (1956) **1.20** FYI Daily **1.25** **Film:** The Searchers (1956) **2.30** **Film:** The Horse Soldiers (1959) **5.00** **Film:** Rio Bravo (1959) **7.50** **Film:** Cannonball Run II (1984) **10.00** **Film:** The Devil's Advocate (1997) **11.20** **Film:** Road to Bad Santa. Featuring contributions by Gremlins star Zach Galligan and Miracle on 34th Street's Mara Wilson. (R) **12.55** **Film:** Scroogie – A Christmas Carol. (1951) **1.25** SuperCasino. **4.00** The Trafford Centre: Countdown to Christmas. (R) **4.50** House Doctor. (R) **5.20** Angels of Jarm. (R) **5.25** Roary the Racing Car. (R) **5.35** Milkshake! Bop Box. (R) **5.40** Peppa Pig. (R) **5.45** Paw Patrol.

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CHOICE



**Peter Capaldi**

**Doctor Who (BBC1, 5.45pm)**  
It's been a bleak year for Whovians. Instead of having a full series to enjoy, there's been nothing apart from spin-off series Class. It's been delightful, but it's just not the same as having some Tardis action to get your teeth into. But, as they say, absence makes the heart grow fonder, and as Steven Moffat (who bows out as the showrunner next year) has had an extra 12 months to work on this single episode, we're expecting big things. Not that the BBC is letting fans know too much about it – as with previous episodes, it's only giving away the barest essentials. So we'll see Peter Capaldi's Time Lord travel to New York, where he comes face to face with a mysterious superhero called The Ghost.

BBC1

**6.00** Breakfast. **9.00** CBeebies The Nutcracker. **9.45** Legend of the Boneknapper Dragon. (R) **10.00** Christmas Day Service – Live from Bristol Cathedral. **11.00** Songs of Praise: Christmas Big Sing. **11.40** BBC News. Weather. **11.50** Film: The Groods. (2013) **1.20** Shaun the Sheep: The Farmer's Llamas. (R) **1.50** Top of the Pops Christmas. **2.50** BBC News: Weather. **3.00** The Queen's Christmas Broadcast. **3.10** Film: Frozen. (2013) **4.45** The Great Christmas Bake Off. **5.45** Doctor Who. **6.45** **Strictly Come Dancing Christmas Special.** Tess Daly and Claudia Winkleman host the festive special, with previous contestants Denise Lewis, Frankie Bridge, Pamela Stephenson, Ainsley Harriott, Gethin Jones and Melvin Odoom. **8.00** **Call the Midwife.** Christmas special, in which the nurses of Nonnatus House travel to South Africa to help the struggling staff of a mission clinic faced with closure. Sinead Cusack guest stars. **9.30** **EastEnders.** Any hopes of a merry Christmas seem slim with Phil's health deteriorating rapidly. Lee struggling with the burden of his secrets and the return of none other than Max Branning. **10.30** **Mrs Brown's Boys Christmas Special.** Grandad's health causes concern, Mrs Brown steps in when a fire at the salon leaves Rory and Dino with nowhere to work, while Dermot faces stiff competition to win a contract. **11.00** **The Best of Tracey Ullman's Show.** Highlights from the comedy sketch show, as well as some brand new material, including a look at what would happen if Clare Balding was left in charge of BBC's Christmas schedules. **11.30** **BBC News:** Weather. **11.45** **On Christmas Night.** Don Warrington reads the bible story of the shepherds' visit to the Christ Child. **11.50** **Would I Lie to You? At Christmas.** With Richard Osman, Tom Courtenay, Sara Pascoe and Chris Kamara. (R) **12.00** Have I Got a Bit More 2016 News for You. **1.05** Citizen Khan. (R) **1.35** Film: While You Were Sleeping. (1995) **2.40** Weather for the Week Ahead. **3.15** BBC News.

BBC2

**6.40** Countryfile. (R) **7.35** Film: The Cat in the Hat. (2003) **8.50** Film: Tom Thumb. (1958) **10.20** Film: Bee Movie. (2007) **11.40** Carols from King's. (R) **12.55** Wild Tales From the Village. (R) **1.55** The Good Life. (R) **2.25** Film: The Artist. (2011) Oscar-winning silent drama, starring Jean Dujardin. **4.00** Dancing the Nutcracker – Inside the Royal Ballet. **5.30** Sign Zone: The Queen's Christmas Broadcast. (R) **5.40** The Morcambe and Wise Christmas Show – 1976. (R) **6.45** **Christmas University Challenge.** Alumni of Magdalene College, Cambridge, and St Hilda's, Oxford compete in the penultimate first-round match of the special run of Christmas episodes. Jeremy Paxman hosts. **7.15** **Blackadder's Christmas Carol.** Kindly Victorian pushover Ebenezer Blackadder is visited by the Spirit of Christmas and gains an insight into the dastardly deeds of his ancestors. Starring Rowan Atkinson. (R) **8.00** **Dad's Army.** Pompos Captain Mainwaring proves he is a softie at heart by organising a Christmas treat for the struggling senior citizens of Walmington-on-Sea. (R) **8.30** **Gospel Christmas.** Gregory Porter and Beverley Knight host a concert from St John at Hackney, London, featuring the London Community Gospel Choir, the House Gospel Choir performing in front of a live audience, with guest vocalists including Katy B, Shaun Escoffery and vocal quintet Vadé. **9.30** **Victorian Bakers at Christmas.** The bakers prepare Victorian Christmas recipes, including twelfth cakes, bread-based punch, roasts to feed entire communities, and mince pies made with either beef or tripe. **10.30** **QI XL.** Sandi Toksvig and Alan Davies are joined by Josh Widdicombe, Susan Calman and Matt Lucas for an extended festive special, with a series of tough questions on the subject of Noel. **11.15** Film: **Great Expectations.** (2012) An orphan is given the chance to rise through high society with the assistance of a mysterious benefactor. Period drama, with Jeremy Irvine and Helena Bonham Carter. **1.15** Film: **A Hard Day's Night.** (1964) **2.40** This is BBC Two.

ITV

**6.00** CITV: Grizzly Tales for Gruesome Kids. **6.10** Grizzly Tales for Gruesome Kids. (R) **6.20** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **6.35** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **6.45** Super 4. (R) **6.55** Sooty. (R) **7.10** Oddbods. (R) **7.15** Oddbods. (R) **7.20** Almost Naked Animals. (R) **7.30** Almost Naked Animals. (R) **7.45** Horrid Henry. (R) **8.00** Horrid Henry. (R) **8.15** Horrid Henry. (R) **8.25** Weekend at Christmas. **9.25** Countrywise: Guide to Britain. (R) **9.55** Film: Despicable Me 2. (2013) **11.55** Film: Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets. (2002) **3.00** The Queen. **3.10** Film: The Lion King. (1994) Disney animated musical, with the voice of Matthew Broderick. **4.55** ITV News: Weather. **5.15** You've Been Framed! Harry's Naughty List. **5.45** Emmerdale. **6.45** **Paul O'Grady: For the Love of Dogs at Christmas.** The comedian visits Battersea Dogs & Cats Home at Christmas, and tries to get a snuggle-toothed shih tzu the royal seal of approval when the Duchess of Cornwall drops by to open a new building. Paul also arranges an ultrasound for a heavily pregnant pug cross and nurses a dog with painfully bowed legs. **7.45** ITV News: Weather. **8.00** **Coronation Street.** Leanne is thrilled when Toyah returns to the cobbles, while Peter and Nick wind up brawling in the street, and Bethany collapses in the ginnet from an overdose. **9.00** **Maigret's Dead Man.** Rowan Atkinson stars as the Parisian detective in the second in a run of adaptations of Georges Simenon's books. Maigret is distracted from a string of attacks on three wealthy farms by a series of anonymous phone calls from a man who claims a gang is trying to kill him. He and his trusty associates LaPointe and Janvier go in search of the caller, which leads them to the discovery of a body that has been dumped out of a car. Maigret is convinced the corpse is the man who phoned him – but his face has been mutilated, making it impossible to confirm his identity. **11.00** Film: **Love Actually.** (2003) Interlinked tales of several people in search of love. Richard Curtis's romantic comedy, with Hugh Grant, Martine McCutcheon, Emma Thompson and Colin Firth. **1.30** Film: King Kong. (2005) **4.25** ITV Nightscreen.

CHANNEL 4

**6.20** Prep & Landing: Naughty v Nice. (R) **6.40** The Bear. (R) **7.10** Painting the Bear Hunt. **7.15** Film: Animals United. (2010) **8.55** The Simpsons. (R) **9.20** The Simpsons. (R) **9.50** The Simpsons. (R) **10.20** The Simpsons. (R) **10.50** Ice Age: A Mammoth Christmas. (R) **11.15** Painting the Bear Hunt. **11.20** Father Christmas. (R) **11.50** The Snowman. (R) **12.20** Film: The Wizard of Oz. (1939) Disney animated adventure, with the voice of Rickie Sorenson. **2.05** The Alternative Christmas Message. **2.15** Channel 4 News. **2.20** Film: It's a Wonderful Life. (1946) Fantasy drama, starring James Stewart. **4.55** The Snowman and the Snowdog. (R) **5.25** We're Going on a Bear Hunt. (R) **6.00** Film: **Home Alone.** (1990) A boy has to fend for himself when he is accidentally left behind after his family jets off to Paris for Christmas. The youngster initially enjoys his freedom, but is soon forced to resort to ingenious booby traps to defend the family home from two dim-witted burglars. Comedy, starring Macaulay Culkin, Joe Pesci, Daniel Stern, John Heard, Catherine O'Hara and John Candy. **8.00** **Travel Man: 48 Hours in Florence.** Rebel Wilson joins Richard Ayode on a rapid-fire tour of the Italian city, taking in as much as they can in just two days. They race past iconic works of art including Botticelli's Venus and Michelangelo's David, take in some street art, go on a rafting trip down the River Arno, climb to the top of the city's cathedral and dine on a traditional tripe sandwich. **9.00** **Gogglebox 2016.** A look back at some of the highlights of this year's series, featuring regular armchair presenters Leon and June, Christopher and Stephen, and the Michaels family offering their thoughts on popular and topical TV shows. **10.30** **Alan Carr's Christmas Chatty Man.** The host is joined for this Christmas special by guests including Tom Daley, Gary Barlow, Dannii Minogue and Martin Kemp, with music from Emeli Sandé and Robbie Williams. **12.35** Film: Four Christmas. (2008) **2.05** Rude Tube Christmas Cracker. (R) **3.05** Very British Problems at Christmas. (R) **4.00** Location, Location, Location. (R) **5.00** Shopperspooks. (R) **5.25** The Restoration Man. (R)

CHANNEL 5

**6.10** Milkshake!: Milkshake! Festive Fun. **6.15** Shimmer and Shine. **6.40** Paw Patrol. (R) **7.00** Angelina Ballerina. (R) **7.20** Ben and Holly's Little Kingdom. (R) **7.35** Film: An American in Paris. (1951) Romantic musical, starring Gene Kelly and Leslie Caron. **9.50** Film: On the Town. (1949) Musical, starring Gene Kelly, Frank Sinatra and Jules Munshin. **11.50** Film: Scrooge. (1970) Musical fantasy, starring Albert Finney. **2.10** Film: The Wizard of Oz. (1939) Musical fantasy, starring Judy Garland. **4.10** Film: Singin' in the Rain. (1952) Musical comedy, starring Gene Kelly. **6.15** **Britain's Favourite Xmas Songs.** A countdown of popular songs that are guaranteed to make any Christmas party go with a swing. Highlights include the Jackson 5's Santa Claus Is Coming to Town, Greg Lake's I Believe in Father Christmas, the Waitresses Christmas Wrapping and the Pogues and Kirsty MacColl's Fairytale of New York. Is Mud's Lonely This Christmas past its sell-by date? Will Jona Lewie ever Stop the Cavalry? And where would any Christmas party be without Slade and their classic anthem Merry Xmas Everybody? But which one will top the nation's festive chart? Featuring contributions by artists, producers, video directors, composers and journalists, who shed light on the creation of the songs and their accompanying videos. (R) **8.30** **When Celebrities Go Pop.** A countdown of the 40 most memorable musical efforts by celebrities who have decided to diversify into music. The programme features performances by Mr T, Katie Price, Vinnie Jones, Sam Fox, Eddie "The Eagle" Edwards, David Hasselhoff, an assortment of soap stars and Christopher Lee, who embarked on a second career as a heavy-metal singer in his 80s. **10.30** **Film: Dallas Buyers Club.** (2013) Premiere. A man diagnosed with HIV sets up an organisation to smuggle drugs for treating the condition into the US. Fact-based drama, starring Matthew McConaughey and Jared Leto. **12.45** Greatest Ever Christmas Songs. (R) **1.10** SuperCasino. Live interactive gaming. **3.10** Chris Tarrant: On the Xmas Express. (R) **4.00** Now That's Funny! (R) **4.50** House Doctor. (R) **5.40** Angels of Jarm. (R) **5.50** Roary the Racing Car. (R)

DIGITAL

**BBC Four**  
**7.00** King Lear **10.10** The Good Old Days: Christmas 1976 **11.00** Top of the Pops Christmas Hits **12.00** Old Grey Whistle Test: 70's Gold **1.30** All Aboard! The Sleigh Ride **3.30** Close  
**ITV2**  
**11.00** You've Been Framed! With Bells On **11.35** Emmerdale **12.00** Coronation Street **1.05** Film: The Polar Express (2004) **3.10** You've Been Framed! **4.15** Catchphrase Christmas **5.15** Minion Madness **5.30** Film: One Hundred and One Dalmatians (1961) **7.15** Film: Mr Bean's Holiday (2007) **9.00** Film: Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason (2004) **11.15** Family Guy **1.10** American Dad! **2.05** The Cleveland Show **2.30** Film: Not Another Teen Movie (2001) **4.10** The Almost Impossible Gameshow **5.00** Planet's Funniest Animals **5.45** ITV2 Nightscreen  
**ITV3**  
**11.30** Film: Carry On Cleo (1964) **1.25** Film: Carry On Girls (1973) **3.15** Film: Carry On Camping (1969) **5.05** Film: Carry On Up the Jungle (1970) **7.00** Film: Carry On Cowboy (1966) **9.00** Film: Stepfoe and Son Ride Again (1973) **11.00** Film: The Sting (1973) **1.40** Film: The Four Musketeers (1974) **3.35** Wycliffe **5.00** Doctor at Large **5.25** Movies Now **5.35** ITV3 Nightscreen  
**ITV4**  
**11.30** Film: The Green Berets (1968) **2.20** Film: Dunkirk (1958) **5.05** Film: Where Eagles Dare (1968) **9.10** Film: Jaws: The Revenge (1987) **10.00** Film: Body of Lies (2008) **12.35** Film: The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo (2011) **3.30** Hell on Wheels **4.15** The Wine Show **5.10** Goodwood Classic Cars  
**E4**  
**11.25** Rude (ish) Tube Shorts **11.30** Baby Daddy **12.30** How I Met Your Mother **2.30** The Goldbergs **3.00** The Big Bang Theory: Festive Guests **6.00** Frozen at Christmas **7.00** The Snowman **7.30** The Snowman and the Snowdog **8.00** The Big Bang Theory **9.00** Film: The Inbetweeners 2 (2014) **11.00** The Inbetweeners **1.20** Tattoo Fixers at Christmas **2.25** Virtually Famous Christmas Special **3.10** The Inbetweeners **3.35** Holyoaks  
**Film4**  
**11.00** Rio (2011) **12.50** Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs (2009) **2.35** Cheaper by the Dozen (2003) **4.25** The Princess Diaries (2001) **6.35** The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel (2011) **9.00** Thor (2011) **11.15** Your Highness (2011) **1.20** Vertigo (1958) **4.00** Close

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## FILM CHOICES

### BOXING DAY

#### Captain Phillips, ITV, 9pm

An American cargo ship sets a dangerous course around the coast of Somalia, while inland, four men are pressed into service as pirates by the local warlords. The captain is taken hostage when the raiding party hijacks the vessel, resulting in a tense five-day crisis. Fact-based thriller, starring Tom Hanks and Barkhad Abdi. (2013)

### TUESDAY

#### Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, ITV, 7.30pm

The teenage wizard is chosen to represent Hogwarts School in a dangerous magical tournament. Fourth instalment of the fantasy saga, starring Daniel Radcliffe and Robert Pattinson. (2005)



Captain Phillips, Boxing Day, ITV, 9pm

### WEDNESDAY

#### Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix, ITV, 7.30pm

The young wizard struggles to convince his fellow sorcerers that the evil Lord Voldemort has returned to life. When Hogwarts headmaster Dumbledore is ousted in favour of a sadistic replacement, Harry realises he must take matters into his own hands, uniting his fellow pupils to form a secret army and training them for the inevitable confrontation to come. Adventure sequel, starring Daniel Radcliffe. (2007)

### THURSDAY

#### Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull, BBC1, 11.20pm

The globe-trotting archaeologist races against Soviet agents to find a mysterious artefact of untold power. Action adventure sequel, starring Harrison Ford and Cate Blanchett. (2008)

### FRIDAY

#### Captain America: The Winter Soldier, BBC1, 8.30pm

The superhuman soldier becomes an operative for secret intelligence agency SHIELD, but grows suspicious of their motives. Following a battle with a mysterious cyborg assassin, he and fellow Avenger Black Widow become fugitives, and try to bring down a sinister conspiracy. Comic-book thriller sequel, starring Chris Evans. (2014)

# Money matters in this mystery tale of murder

TV may have brought us the definitive version of Hercule Poirot, but the BBC feels like the small screen home of Agatha Christie.

It has adapted the Miss Marple cases, and broadcast adventures based on the Tommy and Tuppence characters last year, as well as a blockbusting version of And Then There Were None.

The latter was shown during the festive season, and this year, there's another all-star Christie feast for fans – this take of her classic short story, The Witness for the Prosecution.

"And Then There Were None made a huge impact last year, garnering great reviews and audiences of over eight million," remarks executive producer Karen Thrusell. "We're thrilled to be reunited with Sarah Phelps as she takes on another iconic title, an incendiary courtroom drama that will keep you guessing right to the very end. The source material is so strong, and we hope the end result will be every bit as striking as And Then There Were None."

The Witness for the Prosecution is

no stranger to screen treatment, of course. The BBC made the first version way back in 1949; a US version made it to TV in 1953, the same year it was first produced as a stage play.

Perhaps the most famous adaptation came in 1957 when it was turned into a movie by none other than the legendary Billy Wilder, who cast Charles Laughton, Marlene Dietrich and Tyrone Power (in his final completed part) in the lead roles.

Then, in 1982, another TV drama followed, this time featuring an all-star cast that included Ralph Richardson, Deborah Kerr, Donald Pleasence and Wendy Hiller. It was recently announced that Ben Affleck will direct and star in a future take on the tale.

Filming for the latest production based on the story took place in Liverpool this summer and sees Toby Jones, Andrea Riseborough, Kim Cattrall and David Haig taking lead roles.

"With the long terrible shadow of the Great War falling across the rackety, feral 1920s, The Witness For The Prosecution is a compelling story of

deceit, desire, murder, money and morality, innocence and guilt, heartbreak and – most painful and dangerous of all – love," says Phelps. "At the centre of this dark and tangled net is the astonishing character of Romaine, a noir heroine for all our times."

Romaine is an enigmatic chorus girl and the partner of Leonard Vole, a young chancer who has been accused of the brutal murder of the enormously wealthy Emily French. She's been found in her handsome 1920s London residence and, having left her fortune to Vole, he certainly had a motive to kill her.

Vole is convinced that Romaine can prove his innocence, but he is in for a terrible surprise...

"Combining Sarah's brilliance with the excellent and skilful eye of our director, Julian Jarrold, we expect to deliver a show that will thrill both audiences who have enjoyed Christie's work before and those who are coming to it for the first time," claims Hilary Strong, CEO of Agatha Christie Ltd.

Let's hope her verdict is the right one!



The Witness for the Prosecution, Boxing Day, BBC1, 9pm

# BEST OF THE REST

### BOXING DAY

#### Still Open All Hours

#### BBC1, 8.30pm

Granville and Gastric find themselves playing marriage counsellors, while Leroy adopts a festive disguise to avoid relationship trouble of a different kind. Meanwhile, Mrs Featherstone struggles to get into the Christmas spirit and Kath attempts to bring the street together as one harmonious choir of carollers to beat Finkle Street once and for all – but does Granville have a trick up his sleeve to help them out? David Jason, Tim Healy, James Baxter and Stephanie Cole star.

### TUESDAY

#### There's a Croc in My Kitchen

#### Channel 5, 8pm

Documentary following people around Britain who keep predatory wild animals as unusual pets. Chris Weller from Kent owns a crocodile, and spent £20,000 converting his house to accommodate the dangerous reptile, while in Gloucester, Patricia and her sons live with a serval, a big cat that is one of Africa's deadliest hunters. Jim and Chris own a 20-stone Komodo dragon, while Terry fears his pet lynx Pudding may have been poisoned. Devon resident Andre owns a wolf hybrid that shares her bed – but fears he may be on his last legs.

### WEDNESDAY

#### Jonathan Creek

#### BBC1, 9pm

It's not quite a Christmas ghost story, but there's definitely a spooky element to Jonathan's latest case, which centres on Daemons' Roost, the home of a 19th-century sorcerer who claimed to be able to summon the powers of Hell. The property now belongs to horror film director Nathan Clore (played by Ken Bones, which is arguably an even better name for a gore maestro) who summons his stepdaughter Alison (Georgie Lord) home so he can explain exactly what happened to her family there when she was a child. Unfortunately, Clore suffers a debilitating stroke before he can come clean, leaving Alison to try to piece together the mystery together herself. Jonathan may be just the man to help her, but his wife Polly (Sarah Alexander) believes he's already got enough on his plate. Meanwhile, the Reverend Wendell Wilkie (Warwick Davis) also finds himself drawn into the mystery.

### THURSDAY

#### Life in the Snow

#### BBC1, 8pm

Gordon Buchanan goes in search of

animals that live in snowy conditions and have adapted to survive in cold weather. The programme features polar bears raising their cubs, owls keeping their supplies of food hidden under a layer of snow, penguins that huddle together for warmth, and wolverines and ravens working alongside each other to find food. He also takes a look at the lives of animals associated with Christmas, including robins and reindeer, revealing the truth behind the story of Rudolph's red nose.



Jonathan Creek, Wednesday, BBC1, 9pm

### FRIDAY

#### Noel's Sell or Swap

#### Live

#### Channel 4, 7pm

Children of the 1970s and 1980s might remember Noel Edmonds' Saturday morning TV show Multi Coloured Swap Shop which, in the days before the internet, gave kids a

chance to offload their junk by exchanging it for someone else's. So, prepare to feel nostalgic as Noel hosts this familiar-sounding programme, in which guests get a chance to bid on an eclectic mix of items. The owners will also be there to explain why they are getting rid of their stuff – it might be an unwanted present, something bought in haste, or the cause of a series of family rows. Or perhaps they just thought it would be more fun to be on the TV than to sell it online. Either way, Noel and his SoS team are here to help.

#### Judi Dench: All the World's Her Stage

#### BBC2, 8pm

She's one of Britain's greatest actors and has also been dubbed 'the second most popular woman in Britain' (presumably the Queen pipped her to the top spot). Now this documentary, narrated by Colin Salmon, looks back over her remarkable 60-year career, and finds out just why she has become such an institution. The actors sharing their memories of working with her include Daniel Craig, Sir Ian McKellen and Billy Connolly, who reminisces about the time he thought Judi was falling for him on the set of Mrs Brown. Former Miss Moneypenny Samantha Bond reveals that she had to calm Pierce Brosnan's nerves before his first scene with the legendary actress.

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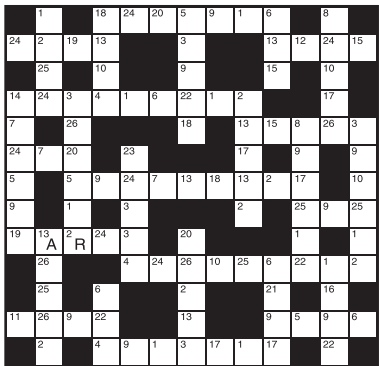
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# BRAIN GYM No.409

## Codeword

Each number in the grid represents a different letter of the alphabet and every letter of the alphabet is used. Use the given letter(s) to the right of the main grid to start you off.



LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION:

1	D	H	G	B	Q	K	P	N	L	Y	Z	A	W
14	J	S	O	E	I	V	U	F	C	X	T	M	R

1	14
2	R
3	16
4	17
5	18
6	19
7	20
8	21
9	22
10	23
11	24
12	25
13	A
13	26

## Double Crossword

Choose either quick or cryptic clues - both fit the same grid.

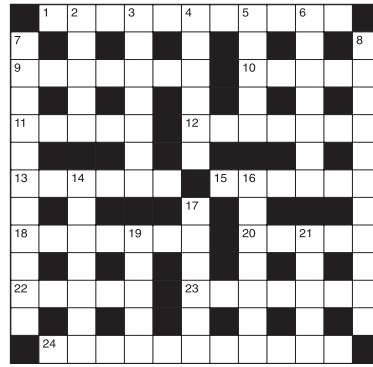
### Cryptic Clues:

#### Across

- Service chiefs? (4,7)
- They may be black or white pelts (7)
- Get to a stretch of the river (5)
- The car that creates records (5)
- His choice will get cross (7)
- Father's attempt to be a kind of cook (6)
- Scarcity of thread, perhaps (6)
- Train that is brought to absolute rest (7)
- Excel in striking a note (5)
- It comes back to beat a giant (5)
- At least a soldier will be (7)
- A case of mixed dates (11)

#### Down

- Turn out a bad scholar? (5)
- She puts on other people's clothes (7)
- Result of a questionable action? (6)
- All-male crew of a novel boat (5)
- Person goes round a nuclear establishment (7)
- Fit to take possession (11)
- Time may be on its side (6,5)
- Don't allow bitterness to remain (7)
- Perhaps ore is turned up on wearing away of the soil (7)
- Soldier with papers in order (6)
- The keynote of medicine (5)
- Is in too much hurry to use the letter-opener? (5)



### Quick Clues:

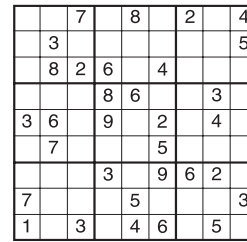
#### Across

- Being tested (2,9)
- Stupid (7)
- Engine (5)
- Bit (5)
- Feeling (7)
- Spent (6)
- Mourn (6)
- Harbour (7)
- Unsuited (5)
- Proportion (5)
- Ingenuous (7)
- Disbelieve (11)

#### Down

- Sound (5)
- Withdraw (7)
- Squabble (6)
- Time (5)
- Exterior (7)
- Indignation (11)
- Insobriety (11)
- Raze (7)
- Narration (7)
- Filament (6)
- Smell (5)
- Upright (5)

## Sudoku



Fill in the grid below so that every column, every row and each of the 3x3 boxes contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

### LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS >

2	9	5	6	1	7	4	8	3
8	4	3	2	5	9	6	1	7
1	7	6	3	4	8	2	9	5
6	8	4	1	9	5	3	7	2
5	2	1	4	7	3	9	6	8
7	3	9	8	6	2	1	5	4
4	5	7	9	3	1	8	2	6
3	1	8	5	2	6	7	4	9
9	6	2	7	8	4	5	3	1

LAST WEEK'S CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS: CRYPTIC - Across: 1 Crossbar; 5 Spot; 9 Anti; 10 Overcome; 11 Downy; 12 Raiders; 13 Grappling iron; 18 Narrates; 19 Fit; 20 Realize; 21 Sarah; 22 Last; 23 Slipends. Down: 2 Rancour; 3 Stirrup; 4 Advertisement; 6 Pioneer; 7 Treason; 8 Trying; 13 General; 14 Airways; 15 Placid; 16 Inflate; 17 Off-hand. QUICK - Across: 1 Communal; 5 Wash; 9 Keen; 10 Relevant; 11 Calms; 12 Edifice; 13 Glamorousness; 18 Vertical; 19 Mine; 20 Revenue; 21 Anger; 22 Silt; 23 Recalled. Down: 2 Overall; 3 Minimum; 4 An eye for an eye; 6 Avarice; 7 Holiness; 8 Remiss; 13 Govers; 14 Arrival; 15 Orient; 16 Nominal; 17 Sincere.

## Quiz

- Which religion's holy book is the Guru Granth Sahib?
- Which sporting entertainers were founded in 1927 by Abraham Saperstein?
- What, in the SI system, replaced the erg?
- Which singer's autobiography is called Take Me Home?
- What was Queen Victoria's residence on the Isle of Wight?
- Which king of England was James VII of Scotland?
- Who provides the voice for wicked Uncle Scar in The Lion King?
- Whose band were the Crickets?
- Which US state is nicknamed the Garden State?
- Who originally conducted the Three Tenors?

### Last week's solutions:

Quiz: 1 Eight; 2 Elgar; 3 Jack Straw; 4 St. Bernadette; 5 A monkey; 6 Guy Gibson; 7 Anna Pasternak; 8 Carpathians; 9 Barbarossa; 10 Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. Niner: GERANIUMS

## Niner

Each number from 1 to 9 represents a different letter. Solve the clues and insert the letters in the appropriate squares to discover a word which uses all nine letters.

9628745 gives a hard rock,  
13784 gives a hard stone,  
9674 gives small stones.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

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High Priest Burger – one of the many choices

# Praise be! It's a Priestly burger

**IN the beginning, there was the burger, and the burger was. . . well, not very good.**

It's fair to say that it has taken the UK some time to master the hamburger. Once the only options you were McDonalds, Wimpy, and the kind of hot food vans you get at Wolves matches.

Not exactly an embarrassment of riches. Eventually Burger King came along and upped the burger game somewhat.

Then The Gourmet Burger Kitchen arrived and changed all that, reasoning that if you were going to be a burger chain, then people might be willing to pay a bit more money and come back for more if the burgers were, you know, actually half-decent.

And so burgers got posh. Rather than the embarrassingly perfunctory slabs of meat and processed cheese on offer at high street fast food establishments, you now get things like dry-aged steak, smoked Applewood cheese, onion jam, truffle mayonnaise and avocado.

The success of Gourmet Burger Kitchen proved that there was a market for Fancy

Pete Cashmore tucks in

Dan poshbunners, and indeed the subsequent rise of Five Guys, of which there are two in Birmingham, proved that you could apply the posh burger ethos to a fast food environment and make it work.

Any city worth its salt has at least one posh burger joint in its midst, and it was with this in mind that, a few months back, Wolverhampton welcomed Burger Priest. How could it possibly fail? It's in a prime location opposite House Of Fraser, with a whole load of footfall due to the fact that the Man On The Oss is around the corner.

Which is why it's puzzling that when myself and my dinner date arrived at 8pm on a Saturday, the place was all but deserted, with more serving staff than customers.

It may well be that we were in some kind of post-dinner, pre-chucking out time lull, or that word of mouth hasn't started working for Burger Priest yet. What this at least meant was that we got to take up one of the sofas in the funky interior – there are sofas, regular tables and high-stool diner-style

counters to choose from. As we entered, Rosanna by Toto was playing on the music system which I took as a good sign. Largely, I was proved correct.

It's a fascinating proposition, is Burger Priest, with a menu full of the weird and the eccentric and the occasionally downright loopy. If you wanted, for example, you could feast on something called the Surf'n'Turf Burger, six ounces of meat patties on a bun, with lobster tail meat and seafood sauce.

## Trimmings

Another option might be the Mac and Cheese Dog, which as the name suggests is a Frankfurter sausage on a bun, topped with crispy bacon and macaroni and cheese. I think it's fair to say that one has enough stodge for anyone.

My comrade and I decided to play it safe and go for the Altar Burger, one each, which is simply a double-patty burger with bacon, smoked Applewood cheese and all the salad trimmings. You have the option of piling on some extras at no extra cost if you feel the need, which I obviously did, and

so I decided to throw in a layer of sautéed mushrooms too – sautéed onions, bell peppers and beef tomato are among some of the other choices.

Now, initially I had intended to just get a burger and fries, but at the last minute I had a rush of blood to the head and decided that my side should be salted beef poutine, consisting of French fries in meat gravy with cheese curd.

Well it seems like Burger Priest subscribe to the American model of meat patty – basically, shape a big lump of beef until it is roughly round and then slap it on the grill with the minimum of frills and let it go. The smoked cheese is, I would argue, the perfect cheese to accompany a burger, and the bacon was thick and rustic.

Burger Priest definitely isn't for everyone – it's loud, it's funky, it's a bit brash and you have to be prepared to literally get your hands dirty. My suggestion to them would be to provide their customers with multiple wet wipes and then they'd be nudging true greatness. Even so, they claim to treat their meaty products with a touch of the divine, and in me, they have a new convert.

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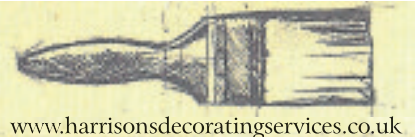


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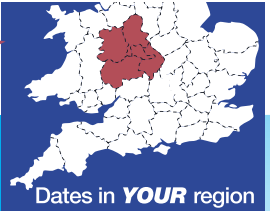
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**JEAN**, mature lady, genuine with many hobbies, slim, blonde and attractive. WLTm interesting gent with GSOH, must be cheerful, looks unimportant. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424675

**HI Gents**, I'm Kelly, a down to earth lady, 35yrs, shapely brunette, seeking someone with GSOH, looks unimportant, any age. ACA, I promise! Tel: 0906 515 3024 Box 424305

**CHRISTINE**, 40, attractive slim sporty brunette seeks fit well built male. Call me let's see what the future brings. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 425061

**NAUGHTY** curvy 46yr old lady, outgoing and bubbly with a naughty side and lots of banter. WLTm chap 30+. If you are married even better. ACA. Tel: 0906 515 3012 Box 424543

**LOUISE**, 29, curvy red haired female, been hurt in the past seeks male to buy her flowers and mend her broken heart. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 425041

**SARAH**, 39yrs, married, seeking chap for no strings intimate times. Special friendship, mutual respect. Give me a call. Tel: 0906 515 3028 Box 408291

**LYN**, 47, curvy quiet sensitive brunette but with a wild side. It could be exciting to know me! Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 425013

**TAMIKKA**, mature black beauty, hourglass figure and open minded. Pls call if you are discreet, broad minded and nice. I can travel and accommodate. ACA. Tel: 0906 515 3004 Box 422365

**RETIRED** happy, caring, attractive female, likes gardening, travel, animals, comedy, seeks tall, funny, kind chap. Shropshire. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 411459

**AMANDA**, 36, tall, slim, busty brunette seeks man, any age, any area, for discreet daytime fun. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 418171

**KATIE** 35yrs, slender well educated brunette seeks no strings mutual pleasure with gent 40+. Must be discreet, married or single. ACA. Tel: 0906 515 3000 Box 419673

**SANDRA**, smart, sophisticated lady young looking 60s, genuine and kind seeks gent with GSOH, looks unimportant. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424671

**JANE**, young 41, very broadminded seeks chap any age for discreet no strings fun, any age, no time wasters ACA. Tel No: 0906 515 3008 Box: 409715

**CAROL**, mid 50s lady, young at heart, attractive and sexy (so I'm told) Give me a call if you are a gent with GSOH. ACA. Tel: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424783

**SOPHIA** young 40yrs, married but bored, seeks discreet adult fun, any area, all calls answered. Tel: 0906 515 3016 Box: 413399

**SUE**, 60s lady, calling all gents who seek a mature solvent stylish lady. I can wine and dine you, you will have a nice time, call or text me. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424781

**EMILY**, mature well educated lady, blonde and sporty and broadminded seeks any age for no strings fun. ACA. Tel: 0906 515 3020 Box 421375

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**JOSIE**, sexy black lady, 52yrs seeks adult times with concerning gent, any age, discreet clean, womanly figure. **Text only Mailbox: 4028592**

**MARY**, passionate honest slim blue-eyed blonde, 39yrs, likes nights in/out, looking for affectionate male, any age to spend adult fun times. Interested? call me. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 425009

**ANNABELLE**, sophisticated 28yrs hoping to meet older gent for adult fun, discreet, sincere, genuine advertiser. **Text only Mailbox: 4157106**

**KAREN**, 47, an attractive blue-eyed redhead, curvy size 16, likes films, football, puns, reading, seeking likeminded male for nights in/out, hopefully more. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 425057

**MELINDA**, 52yrs, attractive and broad minded seeking chap any age for some fun. Couples also. **Text only Mailbox: 4131946**

**JULIE** attractive 35yr old female with a great body, looking for no strings attached evening meetings. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 425037

**HI I'm Ellie**, 39, pretty, funny, great figure, OHAC/child, have everything apart from a man, WLTm someone I wanna be with, not have to be. Call me. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424635

**ATTRACTIVE** professional lady, 57, widow, likes dining out, country pubs, good conversation and laughter, seeks genuine professional gent, with a gosh with similar interests, to enjoy life with. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424157

**CALL** or text me, I'm Claire, single, 41yrs loves life to the full, hoping you will contact me if you want a genuine fun time. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424779

**SARAH**, mature feminine lady, kind caring but still has a sensual side, hoping to meet like minded, confident, non smoking gent with GSOH, looks unimportant. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424777

**PROFESSIONAL** lady, mid 60s, interests in active gardening, theatre, walking, days out and travelling, animal lover, looking for a professional gentleman, kind and caring, intellectual and outgoing, with gosh, for friendship possibly more, in the Stafford area. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424569

**MELANIE**, 49yrs, varied interests, attractive, sensual lady seeks gent any age or status, call, see what happens. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424337

**CALLING** all Gentlemen! I'm Janet a mature solvent stylish lady, I'm waiting for you to call me so we can windline and have some good times ACA. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424335

**BABS**, single mum looking for adult companionship, any age/looks or status. Interested? Come on over to my place. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424253

**HI I'm Angie**, attractive petite mid 50s lady, I'm a very active lady, with lots of interests. WLTm chap with GSOH, looks/age unimportant. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424333

**HELLO Gents**, I'm a mature attractive interesting lady, with gorgeous eyes, I'm smart, sophisticated, love theatre and films. Give me a call or text me. Looks unimportant, must be kind. ACA. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424331

**SICK** of being stuck on the shelf, Jenny, 45, attractive female seeks N/S caring male 42-55 who feels the same to share adult companionship, meals in/out, possibly LTR. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424225

**SENSUAL** tactile, attractive female, long blonde hair, blue eyes, loves travel, wine/dining, WLTm genuine male for mutual companionship. Looks unimportant. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424231

**HI I'm Pam**, 42, slim, blonde, green eyes, discreet, loves cuddles, seeking similar discreet tactile male for mutual friendship with benefits. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424101

**LOUISE**, 39, tactile good-looking solvent female WLTm spontaneous male for holidays, spoiling and lots of fun times. Age/looks/status unimportant. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424055

**NAOMI**, 43, attractive fun loving female with lots of love to offer a genuine caring guy. Come on, lets share all the good things life has to offer together! Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424085

**CLARA**, 32yr Irish lass working away from home and friends, lonely and looking for older male companionship with no ties or complications. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424021

**FEMALE** 50, seeks male of similar age for friendship, possible relationship. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 350529

**HEATHER**, 48, well travelled solvent brunette divorcee, looking for older English gent to teach me some new steps, tall in love with, spoil, pamper and make feel very special. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424425

**TERRI**, attractive young looking 29yrs, long legged sporty seeking nice man to fall in love with, up to 45yrs. If that's you pls call, you have nothing to lose. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424377

**SUSAN**, 43, pretty green eyed brunette looking for an interesting attractive man who would understand my wicked sense of humour. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424081

**JOY** attractive Asian female 37, loves to dance, looking for older English gent to teach me some new steps, tall in love with, spoil, pamper and make feel very special. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424255

**ANDREA**, 43, slim with long dark hair, blue eyes, loves to dance seeks romantic man to share intimate moments in or out. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424747

**DIVORCED** female, attractive, sensual by nature, OHAC, bored with own company, looking to make life a little more exciting with likeminded man. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424591

**JANE** 40s, blonde blue-eyed petite build, WLTm understanding discreet tall, caring man for daytime meetings. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424769

**PATRICIA**, 50s, solvent female, tactile, fun, likes to travel, seeks tall, easygoing mature male to enjoy all the good things in life with. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424553

**ELLA**, 46, slim confident brunette, tired of spending lonely nights alone, seeking honest, romantic male to enjoy nights out, hopefully leading to more. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424015

**JANE**, attractive blonde lady, genuine, sincere, likes theatre, meals out, looking to meet nice looking professional single man. **Text only Mailbox: 5535192**

**JULIE**, attractive early 40's brunette, size 10, varied interests, WLTm male for fun times, good conversations, spoiling and maybe more. status unimportant. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 423903

**LYN**, 39yrs, dark hair and blue eyes, WLTm action man of any age for fun and games. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 423899

**AMY** 31yr old single mum, new to the area, looking to meet male companion to help make me settle in and feel special again, age/status unimportant. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424051

**TALL**, slim and curvy woman, 57, attractive with GSOH and varied interests, seeks similar man 50-65 Bristol area, for discreet assignments. **Text only Mailbox: 5546538**

**DIANE**, loving and caring, young 72 year old, blond hair, brown eyes, smoker, looking for genuine male with gosh, for friendship. Wall area. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424025

## Single Men

**MALE**, 64, single, n/s, likes music, films, driving, nights in, dining out, trips, WLTm lady, 50-70, looks unimportant, for friendship and relationship. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424927

**CARING** male, 55, N/S, medium build, likes meals out, music, cinema, sports, driving, seeks female, 40-60 for friendship. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 239148

**HONEST** male, 60s, N/S, GSOH, car owner, seeks female, 55-70 for friendship, maybe more. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 416817

**MALE**, 63, caring, easygoing, N/S seeks female 50-70 for friendship and romance. Looks unimportant. Likes occasional drink, eating in/out, cinema and driving. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 418893

**CHRISTIAN** male 51, seeking Christian female, 35-45 for friendship, possibly more. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 423747

**MATURE** male, 50, medium-build, varied interests, seeks true Christian female, 35-45, who enjoys evenings in and dining out, for friendship or possibly more. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 419283

**MALE**, 59, 512, dark hair, looking for a lady, 50-60, to share the good things in life. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424759

**IAN**, 518, medium build, OHAC, late 50s, likes most things, holidays, gardening, motorbikes, WLTm similar aged lady, 50-60, with nice personality. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 421345

**MIKE** 49, slim, young looks, seeks female, 35-50 for friendship and going out. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 356651

**DAVE**, 54, 5110, medium build, easy going, happy, looking for an attractive, loving and caring female, 45-65, for friendship and relationship. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 423073

**YOUNG** 70 widower, fit, lonely, 5ft 11ins, 11st, likes drives, walks, DIY, meals out, gardening, smoker, looking for lady to spend life with. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424687

**BIG** is beautiful is larger is lovelier, Steve 58, seeking broadminded, adventurous BBW for fun times. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 412031

**TOM**, 32, slim, attractive, own home, likes to eat out and in, WLTm honest, kind girl for tender, loving care and fun times. No time-wasters please. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424929

**MALE** 50 seeks mature, home loving lady, 60 plus who enjoys cosy nights in. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424683

**MARTIN** trustworthy, warm hearted, loving, reliable male, 45, 6ft, medium build, young at heart, GSOH, seeks female, 50-60 for friendship, maybe more. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424681

**MARK** 48, slim, fit, GSOH, looking for loyal partner for LTR. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424679

**CARING** 55yr old male, widower, 6ft 3ins, WLTm lady, 40-55 for fun and laughter, maybe happy ever after. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424677

**MALE** 57, attractive, seeks mature woman any age for close fun, married or single. **Text only Mailbox: 5410860**

**ANY** mature women over 60 seeking adult fun - this attractive male 58 will cater for your needs, any size or status. **Text only. Mailbox: 5410860**

**WIDOWER**, 60s, GSOH, n/s, likes places of interest, country walks, cats and dogs, music, theatre and cinema, still looking for a lady, around 55-65, for companionship, ACA. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424709

**ATTRACTIVE**, tall, dark, professional male, 50, GSOH, easygoing, enjoys sport, socialising, good company, looking to meet attractive female for fun, adventure and take things from there. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424563

**59YR** old male, likes country walks, pub lunches, seeks lady for friendship, maybe more. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424685

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**IAN**, GSOH, 60, looking for somebody to go out with and have a good time, a good laugh, maybe things will move on, I'm young at heart so looking for younger female if possible, NSA. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424357

**RETIRED** male seeking companionship maybe more. No time wasters. **Text only Mailbox: 5542315**

**ITALIAN** male, 46, from Oldbury, seeking female, 30-50, for friendship, possible relationship. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424371

**MALE**, 59, 512, looking for genuine lady, 50-55, to share the good things in life. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424353

**NICE** old-fashioned gent, seeks kind, caring romantic lady for LTR. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 416905

**BLACK** male, ex-marine, 61t, would like to meet a lady, 30 or over, if you would like a night in or out, Birmingham area, give me a shout. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424507

**ADVENTUROUS** 36-year-old male, slim, dark hair, likes music, cycling and photography, seeks female for friendship, maybe more. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 417235

**GENT** 48, youthful outlook, likes countryside, keep fit, karaoke, seeks soul mate for fun times, N Shropshire. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 408411

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**STEVE**, 53yr old male, laid back, likes most things in life, seeks female 40-50, for evenings out, need some TLC in my life. **Text only Mailbox: 4362854**

**MALE**, 44, very interesting person, own business, sporty, honest and genuine, likes nights out, meals out, cinema, country walks, WLTm a lady for friendship and good company leading to a permanent relationship. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 420841

**WHITE** curvy lady any age, required by handsome black professional male, for discreet casual adult fun. No time wasters pls. **Text only Mailbox: 5066605**

**ROB**, 63, 6ft, slim, own hair own teeth, young at heart, considered good looking, OHAC, solvent, so get back to me please. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424027

**HELLO!** I am an easy going chap and I WLTm a lady, 55-65 for a permanent relationship, so please get in touch. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424311

**TONY** from Walsall, mid 50s, stocky build, looking to meet a lady any age/looks/race to have fun times with, so please get in touch if you're interested. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424067

**TIM**, young at heart, intelligent, fun loving, spontaneous, GSOH, WLTm a lady with a GSOH, for friendship and possibly more. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424395

**ATTRACTIVE**, Tall and intelligent Black male 50, lover of animals and nature seeks solvent lady of quality 50+ for romance. **Text only Mailbox: 5561456**

**47** year old guy, 5ft7, dark hair, blue eyes, likes DVDs, nights in and out, seeks female, 42-49, in Leamington Spa/Rugby area, for friendship and long term relationship. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424325

**ANDY**, single, 53, looking for a mature, sexy lady, age/looks/unimportant, for fun and adventure. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 428993

**MALE**, mid 60s, honest person, lots of interests, looking for a lady, 45-65, to share the good times with. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424321

**TALL**, 63-year-old male, seeking n/s female, 45+, for hassle free fun times, in the Wolverhampton and surrounding areas. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424291

**JAY**, attractive, 61t2, single father, loves a laugh and a giggle, looking for a lady for evenings out, company and maybe more. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424303

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**KARL**, young boyish male, 5ft 8ins, likes arts, travel, music, seeks tall, blond male for LTR. Shropshire. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 375989

**YOUNG** creative, boyish lad, 28, 5ft 8ins, dark hair, slim, smooth, likes animals, classic cars, sports, bars, travel, seeks tall, supportive older female. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 387387

**GAY** feminine female with GSOH WLTm gay feminine females for friendship, possible relationship. **Text only. Mailbox: 5631357**

**MATURE** bi male, looking for younger company, fun and good times. Can accommodate. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 425127

**JONNY**, 24yrs, gay curious, not sure what to do, older men pls call me and help me understand. **Text only Mailbox: 4068657**

**BOYISH** male, 517, smooth, cultured, passive, likes arts, animals, Mediterranean lifestyle, seeks active, tall, funny man for LTR. Shropshire/London/anywhere. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424973

**BI** male seeking male for fun times and friendship. **Text only. Mailbox: 4830151**

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Double matts from £59  
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A BEST CASH PRICE  
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COLLECTIONS  
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RESULTS CALL  
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WE'LL BEAT ANY QUOTE  
Work Guaranteed  
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DELIVERY  
AVAILABLE  
[www.portwayfencing.co.uk](http://www.portwayfencing.co.uk)

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READERS ARE ADVISED  
To check that anyone  
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It is an offence under the Gas  
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Regulations 1998 to carry out  
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A MAN WITH A VAN Single items,  
flat/house removals/clearances,  
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CALL DEAN NOW: For all your  
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**GRINSELLS  
SKIP HIRE**

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HELPED  
ME...**

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Classified advertising  
in the Express & Star  
we are really busy!  
It definitely  
works for us!

Grinsells Skip Hire.

FOR GREAT BUSINESS RESULTS CALL  
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## 4 Pets & Animals

### equestrian corner

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Passport information.

### guns & dogs

NOTICE TO ADVERTISERS  
Advertisers must ensure that  
they meet all necessary legal  
requirements for owning and  
using guns.

### pets corner

NOTICE TO READERS  
Please be aware that when  
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some simple guidelines you can  
follow to ensure that you are not  
purchasing from a Puppy  
Farmer:  
1. Try to ensure you visit the  
puppy whilst it is still with it's  
Mother.  
2. Do not arrange to collect a  
puppy from any other location  
than that of the breeder.  
3. Ensure that you are given any  
KC documentation, if pedigree.  
Whilst Midland News  
Association publications take  
great care to avoid publication  
of advertisements from Puppy  
Farmers we cannot accept any  
liability should readers  
purchase from this kind of  
establishment.

SHIH-TZU CROSS bitch, 5 months,  
house trained, chipped, wormed,  
genuine sale, very playful, ok with  
other dogs, £350. 07730 480857.

SHIH-TZU PUPPIES all males, pedi-  
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07851 983766.

### vets

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experienced Sales  
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## 5 Business & Farming

### business opportunities

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take appropriate professional  
advice before entering any obli-  
gations.

## 6 Property

### overseas property

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Readers are advised to seek  
independent legal advice before  
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ments.



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We have been advertising in the Express & Star and Chronicles for over 20 years and consider it a key part of our business with the regular flow of calls, which our advertising generates.

*Black Country Homes*

FOR GREAT BUSINESS RESULTS CALL **01902 319 191** Brought to you by **Express & Star**

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Sell today, sign today, complete when u wish  
**£££ RENT BACK OPTIONS £££**  
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Ring Paul 24/7 Local **07870 341 089**  
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Wolverhampton: Call 01902 489901  
[www.homecashbuyer.co.uk](http://www.homecashbuyer.co.uk)

**ClassifiedAds** BUY LOCAL, SELL LOCAL



**IT WORKS FOR ME**

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*Black Country Homes*

FOR GREAT BUSINESS RESULTS CALL **01902 319 191** Brought to you by **Express & Star**

**Need to sell your home fast?** **Purchase Agreed Within 7 DAYS**  
We can help you make a fresh start  
With solutions to suit ...  
you can clear your debts and make a fresh start  
**MARION | PROPERTY SOLUTIONS**  
**WHY NOT CALL US TODAY** **\*Terms and Conditions apply**  
for an informal, friendly and confidential chat?  
**0121 405 0797** **OUR LINES ARE OPEN 24/7**

**ClassifiedAds** BUY LOCAL, SELL LOCAL



**CLASSIFIEDS HELPED ME...**

"I am really pleased with the response I get from my Classified Advertising!"  
*Paul Westwood - Home Cash Buyer*

FOR GREAT BUSINESS RESULTS CALL **01902 319 191** Brought to you by **Express & Star**

**accommodation to let**

**7 Jobs**

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REAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOU

**Express & Star**

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**FILL YOUR NEXT VACANCY WITH OUR BRONZE FIXED PRICE RECRUITMENT PACKAGE**

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- 5cm x 2 column advert in Express & Star (Thursday)
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**Register your CV today, visit:**

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**WE CAN HELP YOU FIND YOUR PERFECT JOB!**

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- JOB ALERTS
- CV MATCHING

**8 Motoring**

**cars over £1500**

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**HYUNDAI TUCSON CRTD CDX 2.0**  
2004, 79,000 miles, MoT December 2017, full leather, very good condition, some service history.  
**£2,600 o.n.o.**  
**07841 836074.**

**AUTOMATIC**  
**SUZUKI ALTO (NEW SHAPE) 1.0 AUTOMATIC**  
2009, 24,000 miles, only 1 previous owner, both keys, books, etc, beautiful inside and out, faultless driver, any trial.  
**£2,500 ono.**  
**Telephone 07800 637961 (Wolverhampton).**

**cars under £1500**

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**£450.**  
**07858 232769.**

**FIAT PANDA 06 reg, full MoT, very good condition, excellent runner. £700 ono. 07810 590427.**

**BARGAIN**  
**MAZDA 6 SALOON**  
56 reg.  
Spares or repair.  
**Best offer around £250.**  
**07850 742388.**

**GOOD RUNNER**  
**ROVER 25**  
04 reg, red, economical.  
12 months MoT, sunroof, CD, new clutch.  
Very good condition.  
**£550 ono.**  
**Telephone 07503 748161.**

**BARGAIN**  
**VAUXHALL VECTRA 2.0 16V CDX AUTOMATIC**  
Electric windows all round, multi CD player, ABS, MoT July,  
R Reg., Spares or repairs.  
**£200 o.n.o.**  
**01902 689071.**

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01384 234854 / 0121 5640090  
01902 550055 [www.homersdrivingschool.co.uk](http://www.homersdrivingschool.co.uk)

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or email [marie.hogg@expressandstar.co.uk](mailto:marie.hogg@expressandstar.co.uk) (remember to include a name/contact number for confirmation of receipt)

**10 Personals**

**personal**

**Start the NEW YEAR with a new adventure and someone to open presents with next Christmas. Let your resolution be to take a chance on love.**  
**For more information ring Attitude 0121 520 8715**

**A 50 YEAR OLD INDIAN MAN**  
Would like to meet lady for holidays, visits to wine bars, between 30-40 years old. All letters answered.  
Please write to:  
**Box Number P20654, Express and Star, Queen Street, Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES.**

**general**

**I AM LOOKING FOR MY SON**  
Mr A. Lewis.  
Last seen Wolverhampton. Please get in touch.  
**Box Number P20647, Express and Star, Queen Street, Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES.**

**BUY LOCAL SELL LOCAL**  
**01902 317878**

**ClassifiedAds**



# New Ignis offers funky, good to drive small car

By Jon Reay

It's been nearly 10 years since the last of the previous generation Ignis rolled out of Suzuki's UK showrooms, and what a difference a decade has made.

While the old car managed to whip up a decent number of loyal customers over the seven years it was on sale, it'd be fair to say that it was a dull-but-worthy creation – well priced and equipped, but hardly the first word in desirability.

Suzuki is hoping that this distinctive-looking new car can succeed where the old car didn't, and provide a properly desirable alternative to European rivals.

On looks alone, the Ignis is off to a cracking start already and manages to pull off the chunky-yet-cute vibe very well indeed. There's no doubt it's a small car, but thanks to a squat stance and puffed-out wheel arches, it looks far more miniature-crossover than jumped-up city car – particularly compared to its rivals.

The interior is similarly impressive. Materials are what you'd expect from a Japanese city car – which is to say general hard to the touch and a bit flimsy here and there – but all the crucial elements like door handles and electric window switches feel pretty solid.

More importantly, the design is spot on, with brightly-coloured details and a two-tone dashboard lifting the ambience inside the Ignis considerably.



Boot space isn't huge but it's adequate

The Ignis is a comparatively tiny car but practicality is still surprisingly good. All cars get five doors, and rear passengers will find a surprising amount of head and leg room – enough for two adults to sit comfortably, particularly on SZ-T and SZ5 cars with their sliding rear seats.

Boot space isn't huge by any means at 260 litres with seats in position, but that's only 10 litres behind the larger Ka+<sup>s</sup>. Selecting the optional four-wheel-drive system will knock that back to 204, however, and it's worth bearing in mind that only the entry-level SZ3 trim can seat five.

Safety is relatively good too, with the Ignis boasting a five star EuroNCAP rating for models equipped with Dual Camera Brake Support. Models without the feature get a three star rating, however.

There's just the one engine option: a 1.2-litre four-cylinder petrol borrowed from the Swift. It's not as perky as the 1.0-litre turbocharged 'Boosterjet' unit you'll find in the Baleno, but it's more than enough to propel the sub-one tonne Ignis along with ease. As in the Swift, it needs some revving to really get going, but if anything that adds to the Ignis's honest appeal.

Some cars get an SHVS 'mild' hybrid system too – effectively a way of regenerating the power used when you brake. Fitting this not only improves the Ignis's fuel economy a smidge, but knocks a few fractions of a second off the 0-60mph figure too.

You sit deliberately high in the Ignis, so visibility from the front and sides is excellent and jumping in and out is an ease. The steering wheel adjusts for rake but not reach, though it's still easy to get comfortable. Buttons and switches are logically laid out in front of you too, and although the touch screen navigation system isn't the most responsive around, it's easy enough to use.

The Ignis has been set up for comfort rather than sportiness – and that seems about right for a car of this type. Ride quality is good even on the larger 16-inch alloys, and things are remarkably stable on motorways.

Take things off the beaten path and things are similarly impressive. The Ignis's optional four-wheel-drive system isn't a particularly sophisticated one, but should be more than enough to get it across a muddy field with ease.

It's hard to fault the Ignis on value for money – even entry-level SZ3 cars get plenty of toys. Air conditioning, front electric windows and a DAB radio with USB and Bluetooth connectivity are all thrown in.

When you consider that barely any other cars at this price can be fitted with four-wheel-drive too, the Ignis makes all the more sense – despite the fact that it's only available as an option on the top-spec SZ5 trim level.

Priced from £11,000.



On looks alone, the Ignis is off to a cracking start

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15/15 VAUXHALL  
**ASTRA VXR**  
**2.0T 240PS 3dr**  
Black, 24,500 miles



**WAS £17995**  
**NOW £16495**  
**SAVE £1500**

14/14 VAUXHALL  
**MOKKA**  
**SE 1.7 CDTi 5dr**  
Orange Rock, 33,200 miles



**WAS £12995**  
**NOW £11995**  
**SAVE £1000**



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Ts & Cs apply

**T Wall Vauxhall** [www.twall.co.uk](http://www.twall.co.uk)  
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**VAUXHALL**



# Most extreme school run for Kodiah

British parents spend almost nine weeks of their lives ferrying kids to and from the school gates, according to new research from Škoda. And for many – over a third (36 per cent) of UK mums and dads – the 'school run' is the most stressful parental duty that they undertake.

However, whilst traffic (64 per cent) is the most common obstacle facing people on their daily commute, spare a thought for those living in the most remote parts of the UK. According to Škoda's study, in the furthest flung places such as the Scottish Highlands and Welsh Valleys, delays to school runs caused by hazards such as flooding rise by as much as 18 per cent against the national average (56 per cent vs 38 per cent).

Livestock on the roads also causes issues. In the county of Sutherland in the far north of Scotland, and in the mid Wales county of Ceredigion, an average of one in ten parents regularly has to stop to bypass rogue sheep and cattle – almost twice as often as any other rural location.

On the back of these figures, Škoda sought out the country's 'most extreme school run' – a nationwide search for the family facing the toughest terrain and obstacles – to put its brand new large SUV, the Kodiah, through its paces in the UK for the first time.

Step forward the Joneses, a farming family based in Pontrhydfendigaid, Ceredigion, Wales.

Nestled amongst stunning picture-postcard scenery, the Jones' land even features its own waterfall. However, despite beautiful appearances, their location also offers up problematic driving obstacles than cause



The children really enjoyed travelling in the Kodiah



The off-road route features mud and water crossings



Part of the extreme run the Jones family has to make to get the children to school

the family delays of anywhere between ten minutes and two hours.

Dad William often has to use his chainsaw to help remove fallen trees, whilst ice and floods also present regular challenges – with a broken-down lorry blocking the road for two solid days last year. The Jones' cottage, Cwmmoiro, sits within its own micro-climate, meaning it can be snowing at home when it is raining at the children's school.

Mum Sarah Jones explained: "Every day

when we wake up we don't know what we're going to come up against on our school run, which is part of the fun of living up here really. We could take our horse Willow, but a 4x4 makes things so much easier."

Prior to its secretive arrival in Wales from the Czech Republic, the seven-seater Škoda Kodiah had completed over a million miles of testing in some of the most extreme climates around the world. In what was a typically wet and windy day in Pontrhydfendigaid,

that testing was the perfect preparation. The Joneses got to experience the Kodiah's outstanding 4x4 functionality, cutting across the valley via a slippery off-road route that features lots of mud and water crossings.

Sarah Jones concluded: "We were hugely impressed with the Kodiah and our journey to school was the smoothest we've ever experienced. It tackled flooded areas and hills with ease and we enjoyed the headroom and nice little extras such as the heated seats. The

seven seats would definitely come in handy for collecting our children's school mates and when they're not being used, we can pop our dogs in the back. The kids really want us to buy one now!"

Watch the Jones' extreme school run here: [skoda.uk/ExtremeSchoolRun](http://skoda.uk/ExtremeSchoolRun)

Škoda's first seven-seater SUV will start from just £21,495 and will be available in four trim levels with five engine options, two and four-wheel drive, and manual or DSG gearboxes.

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[expressandstar.com/drivetime](http://expressandstar.com/drivetime)





Connor Newell, aged 14 from Willenhall, practises in the water



Young club member Jaden Davies, aged seven



Chloe Hall, aged 12, gets to work in the pool



Swimming club members are now making a big splash

# Swimming club hoping for new wave of interest

## SPORTING FEATURE

By Lewis Cox

**HEATH Town Swimming Club boast a long and illustrious history – and are now appealing for ‘fresh blood’ in a bid to keep the club afloat.**

The ASA-affiliated outfit have been a registered club for 83 years, and several of their volunteers and have been involved for around half of that time.

They have seen good and bad times, riding the wave of great highs and plunging to the depths of difficult lows.

One of those lows arrived when their home – Bushbury Swimming Baths in Wolverhampton – was forced to close in November 2006.

Numbers dwindled but, thanks to a few hardy souls that kept the club going at other baths, the Heath Town club lived on.

“I think we were down to just 16 swimmers at that time,” said Sheila Ratcliffe, aged 69, a former welfare officer and now assistant coach at the club.

### Important

“Keeping it running was so important because once a club folds then it’s very difficult to get it started back up again.”

It was the dedication of Ratcliffe and the committee that helped keep the club afloat.

They moved on to Wolverhampton Swimming and Fitness Centre shortly after and began building from the bottom again.

Ratcliffe, who has been helping out for 42 years, estimates there are around 200 members now connected with the club. But while that sounds impressive, she warns many of those are non-swimmers and some do not attend regularly.

They train on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday evenings and use both the larger and smaller pool at the facility. “Numbers dwindle with kids in the sum-



Heath Town Swimming Club coach Rob Bonner at Wolverhampton Swimming & Fitness Centre

**“Keeping it running was so important because once a club folds then it’s very difficult to get it started back up again.”**

mer holidays but we expect that,” she said. “We need about 35 in the big pool and 20 in the little pool to pay the centre, it’s quite expensive.

“We cater for beginners and improvers and then they go into the big pool where we train with six lanes – our head coach Rob Bonner is a Level Two coach.”

Like Ratcliffe, Bonner’s association with the club began as merely ‘a parent’. Taking their children along to learn how to swim quickly turned into a hobby and a passion.

But Ratcliffe, originally from Wednesfield but who now lives in Willenhall, reflects the will to volunteer at a sports club is not what it once was. “We’ve adver-

tised for new volunteers or coaches – that we’d happily pay – to help keep our club going but people have too many other things to do these days,” she said.

“It’s not like it used to be. We also have Margaret Bennion, Alan Robinson and Joan Jarvis help out as volunteer coaches and they’ve been doing it nearly as long as me.

“The president, secretary and treasurer are all here but we’re all getting on and we need youngsters to step in, we need fresh blood.”

Club president is Ray Green, awarded the MBE four years ago for services to schools and swimming. His wife Sheila is secretary and Malcolm Foley – who used to swim with Ratcliffe’s daughter Wendy – is treasurer. “You can see how it is, we’ve all been here for a while and we love it and enjoy it but it is difficult,” Ratcliffe conceded.

“I never thought I’d be here all these decades later after bringing my children. If it wasn’t for my youngest grandson Connor coming to swim I might not have still been involved. But looking at it, it’s my passion and my hobby. We’ve been associated for so long, we just do it for the love.”



Sheila Ratcliffe with juniors Gracie Harrigan aged six, Zak Davis, seven, Jaden Davis and Lexie Davis, eight



Sheila Ratcliffe, president Ray Green MBE and coach Rob Bonner with club youngsters





## Late free-kick earns a point for Glassboys

**Stourbridge 1 Spennymoor 1**  
A 97th-minute free-kick from substitute Drew Canavan rescued an Evo-Stik Premier Division point for FA Cup heroes Stourbridge.

Glassboys keeper Matt Gould pulled off a string of good saves to ensure the first half ended goalless.

He denied David Dowson with an excellent stop and then dived bravely at the feet of Jamie Chandler after the diminutive midfielder had danced his way into the area.

The Glassboys rarely threatened before the interval but went close to breaking the deadlock five minutes into the second half when Dan Scarr's header from a corner was cleared off the line. But it was Spennymoor who opened the scoring on 59 minutes when Gould was finally beaten by Mark Anderson's looping header.

Luke Benbow, another shining light for the home side, twice went close to equalising as Stourbridge finished the stronger but it was left to Canavan to level deep into injury time.

Assistant boss Jon Ford described his side's performance was a little 'after the Lord Mayor's Show', but felt they deserved their point.

That result leaves Stourbridge ninth in the table, four points behind the last of the play-off positions, currently occupied by Hednesford Town.

Ford said: "We'd been knocking at the door for a while and had a few opportunities, so I thought it was a just reward."

"Spennymoor are a very good side. You can see why they're up there and their recent form has been good."

"It was a bit after the Lord Mayor's Show but, following all the events of Tuesday night, we've managed to come away with a point against a very good side so we're pleased with that."

## Crowd played big part in cup success, reveals hero Gater

STOURBRIDGE midfielder Connor Gater has revealed just how important the fans were in their FA Cup success against Northampton.

The Evo-Stik League Premier Division side pulled off a spectacular win against their League One opponents, taking them through to the third round of the FA Cup for the first time in the club's history thanks to Jack Duggan's dramatic winner.

Stourbridge now face League Two Wycombe on January 7. And Gater, who came on as a second-half substitute, praised the fans, as well as his personal friends and family, who roared the team to victory: "There's no greater feeling than playing for all your friends and family in the crowd," he said.

"They didn't disappoint, the fans were incredible, the adrenaline is great with the atmosphere like that."

He also revealed his pride at playing for his home town club: "It was a great feeling coming off the bench and playing for my home town club, with a great group of lads that made it happen, I'm proud of the way they played."

## Six of the best in DK winning run

**Whitchurch 10 DK 16**

DK hit back from a 10-0 half-time deficit to extend their winning run to six games, the best current winning sequence in Midlands One West.

In the process, DK recorded their first double of the season.

In front of a good crowd, boosted by a good contingent of the Heathbrook faithful, Whitchurch started better, and were 5-0 up when a missed tackle on full-back Tom Davies led to the opening try.

DK came under a period of pressure again and with so many defensive situations the referee de-

### Rugby

cided John McGregor had infringed once too often and it was worthy of a yellow card. During the ensuing 10 minutes the DK defence cracked again and conceded another try.

For DK half-time was the turning point, whatever was said certainly worked in the next 40 minutes.

DK lost scrum half Joe Mullock to a serious-looking arm injury. But, from a penalty into the corner, the lineout, catch and drive led to Luke Greenwood crossing the line. George In-

gram was unable to add the extras. Nic Adams soon restored parity, though. This time Tommy Huggins took the kick, but put it wide. The same player did, however, add two penalties to give DK the win.

**Stourbridge 26 Luctonians 5**

STOUR took their time to pull clear of the determined but ultimately outgunned challenge of their Herefordshire visitors.

Dan Rundle scored the opening try, with one from No 8 Ciaran Moore and a brace from Joe Heatley, including the bonus point fourth try.

Stourton Park hosts the traditional fixtures with DK on Boxing Day, 11am kick off.

# FESTIVE POINTS WRAPPED UP

**Old Halesonians 39 Longton 6**

**THERE was a festive feel to this game as an expectant home crowd hoped for a repeat of the previous week's victory at Derby.**

The home side saw a change with skipper Steve Leach replacing injured Ben Barkley in the centres with Colt Kieran Haynes starting in the back row and second row Jamie Powell on the bench.

They got off to a great start with a try after just five minutes thanks to a brilliant individual try from Chris Danks.

From the restart, Hales again attacked. Longton were penalised in their 22 and full-back Ian Briggs converted for an 8-0 lead.

On 13 minutes it was 15-0, with Danks scoring his second try, converted by Briggs.

### Extended

Longton forced two penalties to reduce the deficit, but they failed to trouble the scoreboard again and Hales extended their lead at the break with a Briggs kick.

The second half was only a minute old when Jay Reid touched down and Briggs converted. Chris Hooper scored the bonus point try, converted by Briggs and the scoring was completed by Luke Smith, Briggs again adding the extras.

Hales play Nuneaton away on Saturday January 7, kick off 2.15pm

**Old Hales 3rds 48 Kiddy 2nds 0**

OLD Hales started well and Dan Smith sprinted clear from 35m to touch down. Rhys Evans slotted over the conversion for an early 7-0 lead.

Old Hales got a grip on the game and from a maul deep in the 22, Tony Shaw broke free to go over for a try from short range.

Second half tries came from Steve Deakin, Jon Harris and Alex Church, with the latter being converted by Evans.

Harris scored a second well-worked try. Tromans added the conversion and a seventh try came from Harry Higgs.

The final score came from Church, converted by Evans.

## Plain sailing as duo strike gold



Halesowen's Crispin Beaumont, left, and Tom Darling celebrate. Credit: Sailing Energy

A HALESOWEN yachtsman clinched a gold medal at the Youth Sailing World Championship.

Crispin Beaumont, together with Hayling Island's Tom Darling clinched a dramatic first place in the 29er Boys' in their final race in Auckland, New Zealand.

The 18-year-old pair went in to Tuesday's sole race just four points behind Gwendal Nael and Lilian Mercier knowing the title would be theirs if they could keep enough boats between themselves and their French rivals.

Beaumont and Darling finished the race in third to leapfrog the French pair - who finished 10th in the race - to the top of the podium, add-

ing the Youth Sailing World Championships gold to the 29er class Worlds bronze they won this summer and last year's Europeans silver.

This was Beaumont and Darling's last event in the 29er. Beaumont said: "We feel pretty good."

"It is really nice to end our partnership winning the big one. It is a great feeling. I have been known to bottle it a few times on the last day! But today I kept my cool and just enjoyed the moment."

More than 380 sailors from 65 nations battled it out across nine classes in Auckland, starting last Friday. Britain finish second in the Nations Trophy for top overall team.

## Greenwood makes return to Heathens

DAN Greenwood is on his way back to Cradley - three years after leaving the club.

Greenwood won the league and cup double with the Heathens in 2013 but was squeezed out of team plans the following season.

He's since spent three seasons with Coventry and ended last season on the injured list, requiring surgery on his collarbone.

He has now agreed to be back with the nomadic Heathens, who will split home fixtures between Monmore Green and Perry Barr.

Greenwood said: "Even though I've been riding with Coventry I've never lost touch with the Cradley lads."

Heathens boss Will Pottinger said: "I'm sure he can do a good job for the team. I'm delighted with the way the team is coming together and everyone is looking forward to the new season."

Heathens have also snapped up Wear-side racer Ryan Burton.

The 23-year-old Sunderland-based rider joins Greenwood, skipper Tom Perry, Danny Ayres - who has joined from Kent - and Joe Lawlor in the 2017 team. Reserve duo Bradley Andrews and Ben Basford are free to speak to other teams, however.

And big-hitters Max Clegg and Ashley Morris are now firmly established SGB Championship riders who will figure for Edinburgh and Newcastle respectively.

Co-promoter Gary Patchett said: "It's never pleasant having to tell a rider that you can't accommodate him in your team. Both Max and Ash will be able to concentrate on progressing in the senior leagues and I'm sure the likes of Brad and Ben will find places elsewhere."

"They have all been a pleasure to deal with and we wish them, and all our former riders, the very best for 2017."

## Yeltz continue to slide down table

**Coalville 3 Halesowen Town 1**  
HALESOWEN Town's poor form continued and they have now not won in four games, sliding to 19th in the Evo-Stik Premier.

They Yeltz produced a bright start and their pressure paid off when Kaiman Anderson gave them the lead with his 17th goal of the season on 21 minutes.

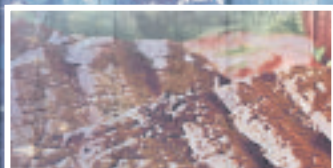
But Massiah McDonald equalised on 26 minutes when he neatly slotted the ball home.

Ryan Robbins bundled Coalville ahead on 74 minutes and - three minutes later - it was game over when Alex Dean curled home.

★★★

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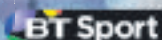
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